STAR TOURS: THE CONTINUING ADVENTURES!

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE | ISSUE 225

STAR WARS INSIDER

Exclusive
An All-New *The High Republic* story!
Fiction!

INTERVIEW:
John Jackson Miller
Writing *Star Wars: The Living Force*

Phantastic!
Celebrating 25 years of *The Phantom Menace*

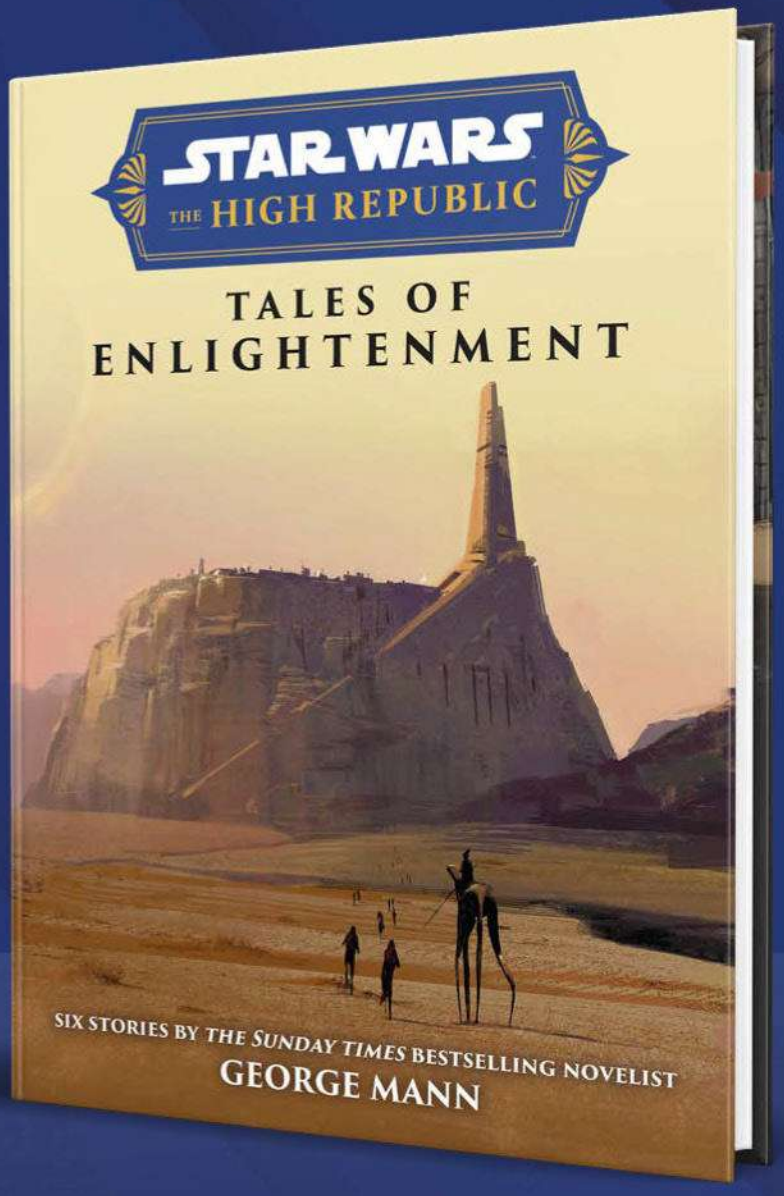
The Bad Batch
Part Two of our exclusive look behind the scenes

Intergalactic Odyssey
Ahsoka Season One Companion

"WHAT HAVE WE HERE?"
BILLY DEE WILLIAMS ON PLAYING LANDO CALRISSIAN

© & TM 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd. All rights reserved. Used under authorization.

ORIGINAL STORIES BY THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR GEORGE MANN



Step into Enlightenment, a cantina located in Jedha City, where every patron has a story to tell.

This special edition contains six short tales, including a bonus story exclusive to this collection, as well as a complete guide to the award-winning second phase of *The High Republic*!

FIND OUT MORE AT

TITAN-COMICS.COM

© 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd & TM. All rights reserved.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

"Hello There!"

"May the 4th be with You!"
There. I thought I'd get that out of the way straight off the bat. Another year has whizzed by like a purrgil hyperspace-jumping between galaxies, making the birth of the *Star Wars* saga an event from even longer ago, and a world that feels ever further away....

Ignoring the 47 years since this all began, 2024 is the 25th anniversary of when it all came storming back into our lives. *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* arrived in theaters on May 19, 1999, and we're commemorating that event by remembering the incredible expectation and excitement that swept over fans ahead of the movie's release—and their hunt for the merchandise that came with it! We also speak to Industrial Light & Magic animation supervisor Hal Hickel about the task of creating the film's astonishing visual effects, and our regular Jedi Quiz sets out to test your Episode I knowledge.

Elsewhere this issue, we take another trip into the past to explore the history of *Star Tours*, the Disney Parks attraction that has been taking guests on breakneck voyages to the galaxy far, far away since 1987. And bringing us right up to date, you'll find the second part of our retrospective on the making of *Star Wars: The Bad Batch* that dives into the detail of the complex international production, and our *Star Wars: Ahsoka* Season One companion looking back at the live-action adventures of our favorite former Jedi.

And last but definitely not least, what have we here? Only an interview with the legendary Billy Dee Williams, the actor who lent Lando Calrissian his suave sophistication and sense of style. What better way to celebrate any galactic anniversary?

I have spoken.

Christopher Cooper
Editor

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS...

Lydia Kang
@LydiaYKang
Poet, practicing physician, and author of young adult and adult fiction, Lydia's *The High Republic* novel *Cataclysm* is available now.

Jay Stobie
@StobiesGalaxy
Writer, media consultant, and Wookiee fan, Jay is a regular *Star Wars Insider* contributor, and commentator for many sci-fi outlets.

Lucas O. Seastrom
www.starwars.com
Lucas O. Seastrom is a historian and writer at Lucasfilm. He grew up on a farm in California and is a lifelong *Star Wars* and Indiana Jones fan.

James Clarke
@jasclarkewriter
Author of *The Year of the Geek*, James is a journalist and lecturer who has written features for *Empire*, *3D Artist* and *Sci Fi Now* magazines.

Chelsea Zukowski
@ChelseaTatham
Journalist, educator, and historian, Chelsea is a Star Wars fan who writes about all aspects of pop culture from books and movies to theme parks.

Brandon Wainerdi
@ActuallyBrandon
Brandon is a writer, digital strategist, and podcaster, with a talent for crossword puzzles and a love of the *Star Wars* galaxy.

CONTACT US

Write to us
UNITED STATES
Star Wars Insider, Titan Magazines, 2819 Rosehall Lane, Aurora, IL, 60503, U.S.A.

UNITED KINGDOM
Star Wars Insider, 144 Southwark Street, London SE1 0UP, U.K.

Email us
starwarsinsider@titanemail.com

Call us
To subscribe in the U.S. please call toll free on 800-261-6502. For U.K. and all other destinations please call 01778 392085 or +44 (0) 1778 392085

Find us
WWW.TITANMAGAZINES.COM
FACEBOOK.COM/STARWARSINSIDER
@SW_INSIDER

Star Wars Insider is also available online. To download, visit: www.titanmagazines.com/digitial

Visit www.starwars.com

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE
STAR WARS INSIDER
ISSUE 225

TITAN EDITORIAL
Editor / Christopher Cooper
Group Editor / Jake Devine
Assistant Editor / Louis Yaman
Editorial Assistant / Ibraheem Kazi
Art Director / Oz Browne
Designer / David Colderley

LUCASFILM
Senior Editor / Brett Rector
Art Director / Troy Alders
Creative Director / Michael Siglain
Asset Management / Chris Argyropoulos, Gabrielle Levenson, Bryce Pinkos, Sarah Williams, Jackey Cabrera, Shahana Alam, Elinor De La Torre and Michael Trobiani
Story Group / Pablo Hidalgo, Leland Chee, Emily Shkoukani, Phil Szostak, and Kate Izquierdo

CONTRIBUTORS
James Clarke, Meg Dowell, Mary Fan, Lydia Kang, John Kirk, Lucas O. Seastrom, Jay Stobie, Brandon Wainerdi, Dan Wallace, and Chelsea Zukowski.

SPECIAL THANKS TO
Lucy Goldsmith, Erich Schoeneweiss at Random House, Holly McIntosh, Joseph Taraborrelli, Andrea Towers and Jim Nausedas at Marvel Comics, Lizzy Draeger, Tracy Cannobbio, Greg Grugsby, Ian Kintzle, Lillian Noble, and Kylie Walker at Lucasfilm. Kevin P. Pearl, Samantha Keane, and Eugene Paraszczuk at Disney.

TITAN MAGAZINES
Production Controllers / Caterina Falqui & Kelly Fenton
Production Manager / Jackie Flook
Sales & Circulation Manager / Steve Tothill
Marketing Coordinator / Lauren Noding
Publicity & Sales Coordinator / Alexandra Iciek
Publicist / Caitlin Storer
Digital & Marketing Manager / Jo Teather
Head of Rights / Rosanna Anness
Head of Creative & Business Development / Duncan Baizley
Publishing Director / Ricky Claydon
Publishing Director / John Dziewiatkowski
Chief Operating Officer / Andrew Sumner
Publishers / Vivian Cheung & Nick Landau

DISTRIBUTION
U.S. Newsstand / Total Publisher Services, Inc. John Dziewiatkowski 630-851-7683
U.S. Newsstand Distribution / Curtis Circulation Company
U.S. Bookstore Distribution / The News Group
U.S. Direct Sales / Diamond Comic Distributors
U.K. Distribution / Marketforce

SUBSCRIPTIONS
U.S. subscriptions / 1-800-261-6502, email: customerservice@titanpublishingusa.com
Canada subscriptions / 818-487-4575
U.K. subscriptions / 01778 392085
email: swmag@servicehelpline.co.uk

For more info on advertising contact
adinfo@titanemail.com

(USPS 003-027) (ISSN 1041-5122)

Star Wars Insider is published eight times per year (January/Feb, Mar/April, May/Jun, July/August, September/October, November/December) by Titan Magazines, a division of Titan Publishing Group Limited, 144 Southwark Street, London SE1 0UP.

Contents © 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd. & TM. All Rights Reserved, Titan Authorized User. TMN14348

PUBLISHER'S U.S. AGENT
2819 Rosehall Lane, Aurora, IL 60503. Periodicals Postage Paid at Aurora IL and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to Titan Publishing, *Star Wars Insider*, PO Box 147, Lincolnshire, IL 60069
U.S. subscriptions $49.99 per year; Canada $64.99 and U.K. £31.99.
U.S. edition printed by Quad.

© 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd. and ™ All Rights Reserved. Used Under Authorization.

STAR WARS INSIDER

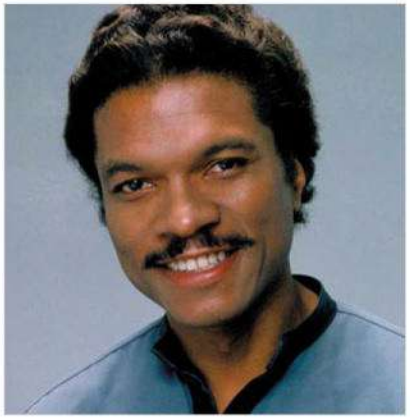
CONTENTS

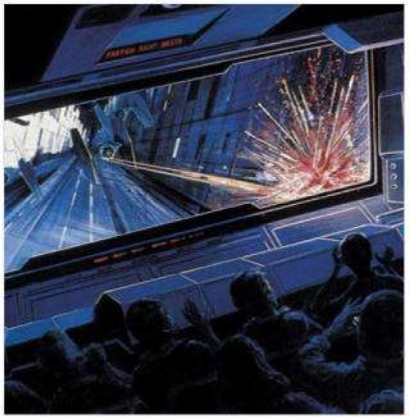
ISSUE 225

25 years of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*

Celebrating the return of the saga to theaters—a quarter of a century ago!

Subscribe to *Star Wars Insider* Page 88





06
Launchpad
Insider's regular roundup of the latest *Star Wars* news.

20
Faith, Fervour, and Fantasy
How the world prepared for the 1999 release of *The Phantom Menace*.

28
Billy Dee Williams Interview
The Lando Calrissian actor talks about his portrayal of the stylish scoundrel.

34
Behind the Batch: Part Two
The creatives behind *The Bad Batch* reveal how the hit series was made.

42
John Jackson Miller Interview
The best-selling author of upcoming novel *Star Wars: The Living Force* on his numerous tales of the Jedi.

48
Star Tours
Industrial Light & Magic artists tell the story of the top attraction's creation and latest updates.

58
Hal Hickel Interview
The Industrial Light & Magic visual effects guru reflects on the innovations in animation that made *The Phantom Menace* possible.

64
Children of the Galaxy
The young characters who's exploits epitomize the themes of *Star Wars*.

70
Star Wars: Ahsoka Season One Companioin
Relive the Disney+ adventure.

78
A Certain Point of View
Our resident holocron keeper explores how the Jedi fell into myth.

90
Exclusive Fiction
The High Republic fiction continues with "Pathogen" by Lydia Kang.

INCOMING TRANSMISSIONS

27
Prize Giveaway!
Win *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi 40th Anniversary Edition* from Titan!

82
Worldwide
Hera Syndulla cosplay, learning a new language, and clashing blades!

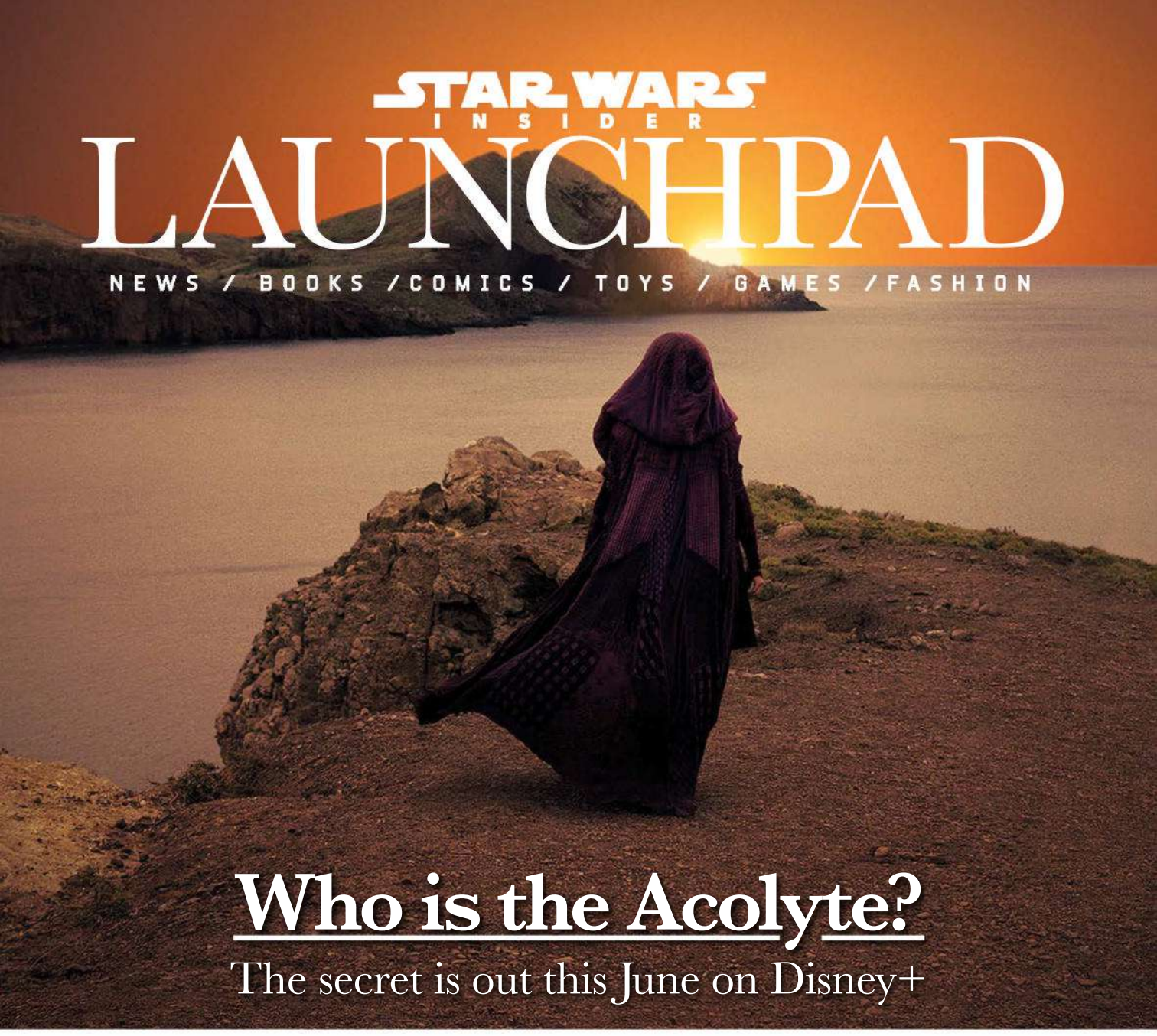
86
The *Star Wars* Archive
Our visual history of the making of *Star Wars* revisits *The Phantom Menace*.

96
Jedi Master's Quiz
Test your knowledge of *The Phantom Menace*.

STAR WARS INSIDER

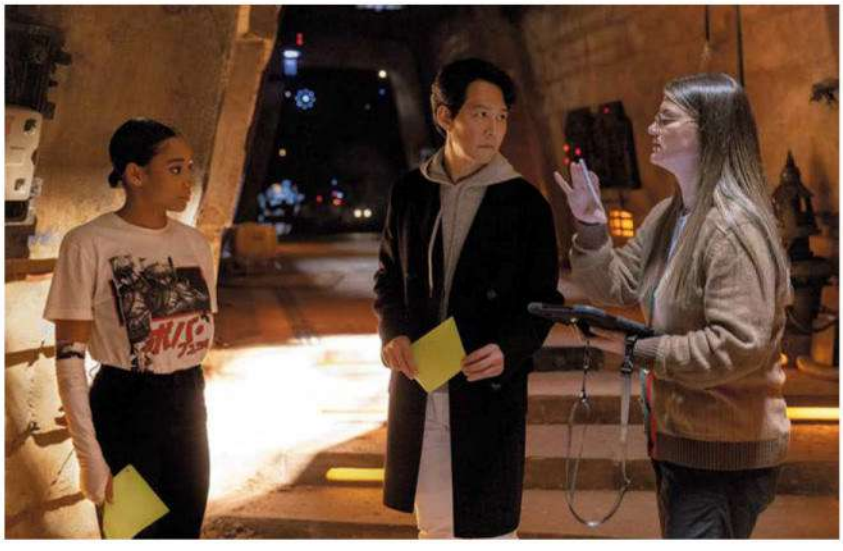
LAUNCHPAD

NEWS / BOOKS / COMICS / TOYS / GAMES / FASHION



Who is the Acolyte?

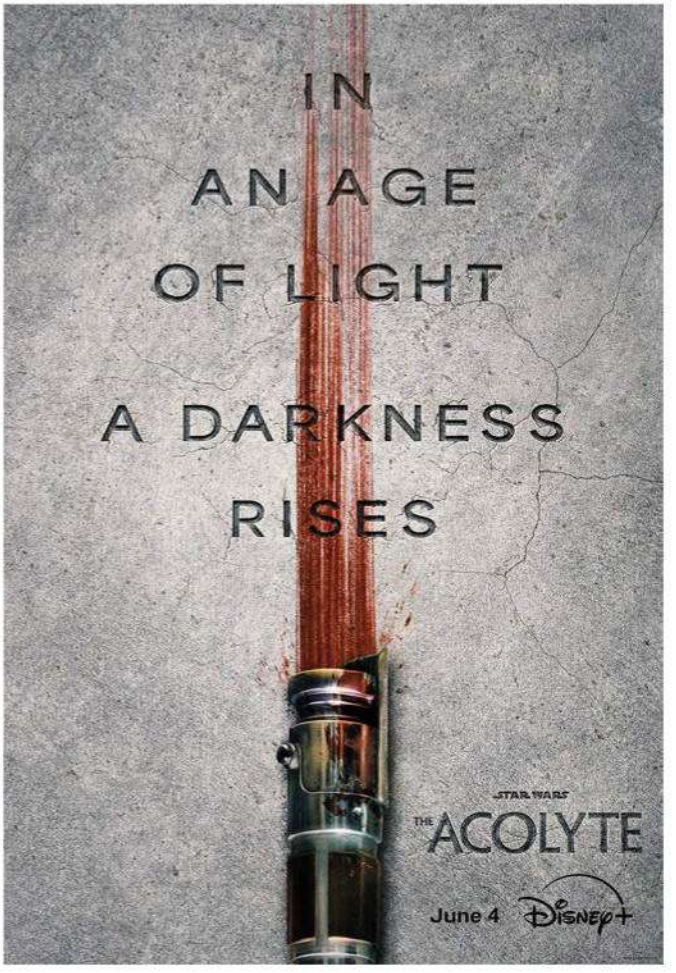
The secret is out this June on Disney+



The long-awaited new Disney+ series *Star Wars: The Acolyte*, created by Leslye Headland, finally arrives on the streaming service on June 4, 2024.

The mystery thriller follows an investigation into a shocking crime spree that pits a respected Jedi Master (Lee Jung-jae) against a dangerous warrior from his past (Amandla Stenberg). As more clues emerge, they travel down a dark path where sinister forces reveal all is not what it seems...

Audiences, too, should expect the unexpected, as Headland hinted to StarWars.com, saying, "Whatever you think *The Acolyte* is, it's not that. It's a



drop in the bucket, baby. Just hang in there and check it out."

Starring Amandla Stenberg and Emmy Award-winner Lee Jung-jae, best known for his role in *Squid Game*, the cast also includes Manny Jacinto, Dafne Keen, Jodie Turner-Smith, Rebecca Henderson, Charlie Barnett, Dean-Charles Chapman, and Carrie-Anne Moss.

Showrunner and executive producer Headland directed the first episode, and the series is executive produced by Kathleen Kennedy, Simon Emanuel, Jeff F. King and Jason Micallef. The series is produced by Rayne Roberts, Damian Anderson, Eileen Shim and Rob Bredow.

Ticket To Ride

Familiar faces and destinations join *Star Tours*

Thrilled by the sight of a pod of mighty purrgil in *Star Wars: Ahsoka*? Then you should head to Walt Disney World Resort, Disneyland Resort, or Disneyland Paris for a chance to visit Seatos, courtesy of *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue*.

The new addition to *Star Tours'* itinerary of destinations launched on April 5, during Disneyland Resort's Season of the Force event, and sees Ashoka Tano (played by Rosario Dawson) send an urgent transmission to guests aboard the Starspeeder 1000.

The new mission was inspired by events in *Ahsoka* in which the former Jedi evaded pursuing starfighters by taking cover amid masses of the hyperspace-traveling creatures, as seen in the exciting *Star Tours* image pictured above. Among updates to the attraction are all-new emergency messages from the likes of Cassian Andor (Diego Luna), and *The Mandalorian*'s dynamic duo of Din Djarin and Grogu. With the new additions, there will now be more than 250 *Star Tours* story combinations, so you may have to book several Starspeeder trips to enjoy them all.

The launch coincided with the start of Disneyland Resort's Season of the Force on April 5. The event runs until June 2, so there's still time to ride Hyperspace Mountain and enjoy an exciting new firework display that will fill the skies above *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge* on select nights.

Disc Destiny

Disney+ shows get physical release

Emmy-nominated series *Star Wars: Obi-Wan Kenobi* and *Star Wars: Andor* arrive on 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray and Blu-ray in the U.S. on April 30.

Originally released on streaming service Disney+ in 2022, both series will now be available as physical discs in the form of premium SteelBooks that boast numerous bonus features and come with exclusive concept art cards. Each features key art by Poster Posse artist Attila Szarka.

Obi-Wan Kenobi: The Complete Series includes director's commentary in which Deborah Chow talks about the show's action-packed finale, with featurettes covering the epic lightsaber fights between Ewan McGregor's Obi-Wan and Hayden Christensen's Darth Vader, the Inquisitors, and Princess Leia's droid pal, Lola.

Bonus material for *Andor: The Complete First Season* focuses on the story arcs of the season across five featurettes, with input from crew and cast including creator/executive producer Tony Gilroy, lead actor/executive producer Diego Luna and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy.

PRODUCTION DIARY

Star Wars movies and television programs coming from a galaxy far, far away....

NOW STREAMING

STAR WARS THE BAD BATCH

Season Three
Starring Dee Bradley Baker and Michelle Ang
Disney+

COMING SOON

STAR WARS THE ACOLYTE

Starring: Amandla Stenberg, Lee Jung-Jae, Manny Jacinto, Dafne Keen, Jodie Turner-Smith, Rebecca Henderson, Charlie Barnett, Dean-Charles Chapman, and Carrie-Anne Moss
Disney+

STAR WARS SKELETON CREW

Starring Jude Law, Ravi Cabot-Conyers, Ryan Kiera Armstrong, Kyriana Kratter, and Robert Timothy Smith
Disney+

IN DEVELOPMENT

STAR WARS AHSOKA

Season Two
Starring Rosario Dawson as Ahsoka Tano.
Disney+

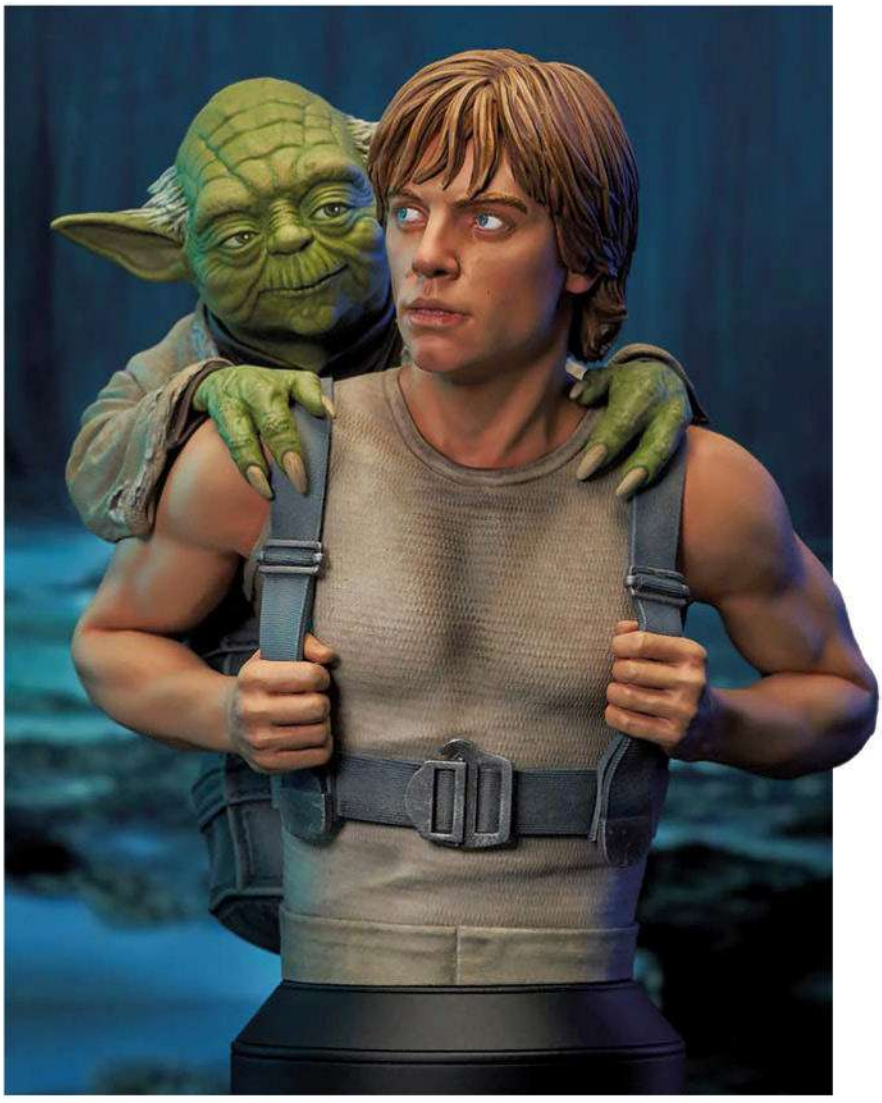
STAR WARS THE MANDALORIAN

THE MANDALORIAN AND GROGU
Directed by Jon Favreau.

My Ally is the Force

Dagobah duo on Display

Guided by Obi-Wan Kenobi's Force spirit, Luke Skywalker traveled to the Dagobah system to train with Jedi Master Yoda. Gentle Giant LTD captures this iconic pairing with its *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* Luke Skywalker with Yoda Mini-Bust, a 1/6-scale creation depicting the two Force users on their journey through the planet's swamps. The mini-bust, which is scheduled to ship in the second quarter of 2024, stands 6 inches tall atop a black pedestal and arrives with a numbered certificate of authenticity. You can pick up your own Luke Skywalker with Yoda Mini Bust for $150 on **GentleGiantLTD.com**.



THE LIGHT SIDE

By Jamie Cosley

A Blast of a Craft

Take flight with the New Republic's E-wing fighter

New Republic E-wing starfighters safeguarded Lothal's skies in the wake of the Empire's fall, and now they can join your own collectible fleet, too. Based on the craft that participated in an exhilarating pursuit of Sabine Wren during *Star Wars: Ahsoka*'s first season, Hasbro's The Vintage Collection New Republic E-wing & KE4-N4 set boasts a high-quality sculpt and design that is perfect for display and play. Scaled for 3.75-inch action figures, this advanced combat vessel comes with a KE4-N4 astromech figure and retails for $99.99. The E-wing is available to order now on **HasbroPulse.com**.

An Astromech for the Ages

Save the Rebellion with your own heroic droid

R2-D2's contributions to the galaxy are too numerous for anyone other than C-3PO to calculate, as the trustworthy astromech helped out his friends battle tyranny from Naboo to Exegol. LEGO has honored the dedicated droid with its R2-D2 buildable display toy model, a 1,050-piece set that features a 360-degree rotating head, a detachable third leg for mobility, a periscope for navigating Dagobah's treacherous waters, and an array of attachable tools. The set also includes a 25th anniversary minifigure of Darth Malak and an R2-D2 information plaque. Measuring over 9 inches in height, the brick-built LEGO R2-D2 droid figure is priced at $99.99 and can be purchased on **LEGO.com**.

The *StarWars* DotColumn

Fascinating features and articles from the digital vaults of StarWars.com

Add StarWars.com/Insider to your browser bookmarks to enjoy *Insider*'s pick of the best of the official *Star Wars* website.

The Phantom Poster
Acclaimed artist Matt Ferguson tells StarWars.com about how he created the 25th anniversary *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* poster.

Michelle Ang
StarWars.com speaks to the actor who voices Omega in *Star Wars: The Bad Batch*.

Bad Batch of Cookies
Love *The Bad Batch*? Love cookies? Then follow Jenn Fujikawa's recipe for these tasty Clone Force 99 treats.

Jedi Gems

Evade the Empire in style with RockLove's elegant jewelry

Order 66 survivor Cal Kestis and his companion droid BD-1 traversed the stars, carrying the legacy of the Jedi Knights forward while clashing with the Emperor's agents. RockLove's *Star Wars* collection sheds light on these resolute wanderers, as the antiqued sterling silver BD-1 Droid Necklace ($135) shines with a three-dimensional BD-1 miniature complete with swinging articulated legs and a blue cubic zirconia crystal. Cast in artisan brass and plated in black rhodium and silver, the Cal Kestis Kyber Crystal Necklace ($150) features a blue Austrian crystal and a 24-inch brass curb chain. Both pieces are available now on **RockLove.com**.

Face-Off Fashion

Wear the words of two friends-turned-foes

The thrilling confrontation between Ahsoka Tano and Darth Vader on Malachor proved to be one of *Star Wars Rebels*' most thrilling moments, and the Ahsoka Tano T-Shirt for Women by Ashley Eckstein draws you right back into that fateful duel. Designed by Eckstein, the garment is emblazoned with a reprint of the script from the "Twilight of the Apprentice" two-part story arc. The text is presented alongside an image of Ahsoka, who stands ready to engage Darth Vader while holding her dual lightsabers. Add this 100% cotton Ahsoka Tano piece to your wardrobe on **DisneyStore.com**, priced $32.99.

The Mandalorian Rebel

Navigate the Path to Peridea with these painted accessories

While Sabine Wren was notorious for her perseverance and strength, her signature art style became recognizable to citizens throughout the galaxy. Loungefly has embraced the Mandalorian's artful endeavors in its Sabine Spray Paint Mini Backpack, which features an applique of Sabine's helmet on a colorful spray-painted background. You can even pair the pack with the matching Sabine Spray Paint Handbag. Also adorned with Sabine's helmet and a vandalized stormtrooper helmet, the handbag features a cartoon of Sabine and a removable crossbody strap. The Sabine Spray Paint Mini Backpack ($74.90) and Handbag ($69.90) are each available on **BoxLunch.com**.

The General's Alliance

A lavish look that lets you fit in with the Ghost crew

Fighting under General Hera Syndulla's illustrious command, the crew of the *Ghost* blossomed from a mere thorn in the Empire's side into an irreplaceable force within the Rebel Alliance. HerUniverse's *Star Wars Rebels* Faces Vintage Fit Denim Pants celebrate these legends by portraying embroidered images of Hera, Sabine Wren, Ezra Bridger, Bo-Katan Kryze, Ahsoka Tano, and Chopper as they appeared in the hit animated series. The 99% cotton and 1% spandex blend jeans also have the Rebel Alliance logo and the word "Rebels" embroidered on the back pocket. Order your own pair on **HerUniverse.com**, priced $59.90

FOR THE REBELLION!

Kit yourself out in fashions inspired by the heroic exploits of the Rebel Alliance

Carry The Cause

It's time to pack your bags and represent the Rebellion

Whether headquartered on Yavin 4 or Hoth, the Rebel Alliance and its leaders were no strangers to packing up and setting course for a new location. Heroes & Villains brings that on-the-move excitement to life with its Rebel Scum Weekender Bag ($150). The rebel-inspired design features detailed embroidery and a metal badge depicting the Rebel Alliance symbol, and the ballistic nylon bag can be converted from a duffle to a tote to enhance its capacity. An adjustable shoulder strap, a vented shoe compartment, and a detachable laundry bag make the set even more versatile. To purchase the Rebel Scum Weekender Bag, make the jump to **HeroesVillains.com.**

Stay on Target!

Set your sights on the Death Star with this tactical tapestry

Dispatched to defend Yavin 4 against unimaginable odds, rebel pilots conquered their fears and successfully destroyed the Emperor's prized Death Star. The RSVLTS Battle of Yavin Performance Hoodie calls upon the tactical schematics that guided these combatants throughout the engagement, combining the stylistic cool of the 1970s with a modern flair. A 92% polyester and 8% spandex blend, the hoodie is covered in the heads-up displays and data seen during the rebels' fateful trench run. The exact pattern locations vary, and this one-of-a-kind Battle of Yavin Performance Hoodie retails for $75 on **RSVLTS.com**.

A Lovable Lid

Show off your affection for a daring rebel droid

There were many astromechs in the galaxy, but R2-D2 always managed to stand out from the crowd and make his opinions known. The RSVLTS Beep-Boop Hat channels R2's blue color and all-seeing photoreceptor, creating a masterpiece that illustrates an abstract representation of the droid on the front and an R2-infused collage under the brim. The Beep-Boop Hat comes in both regular crown and sloped crown variants, as is priced at $35. Available now on **RSVLTS.com**.

The Best of the Vest

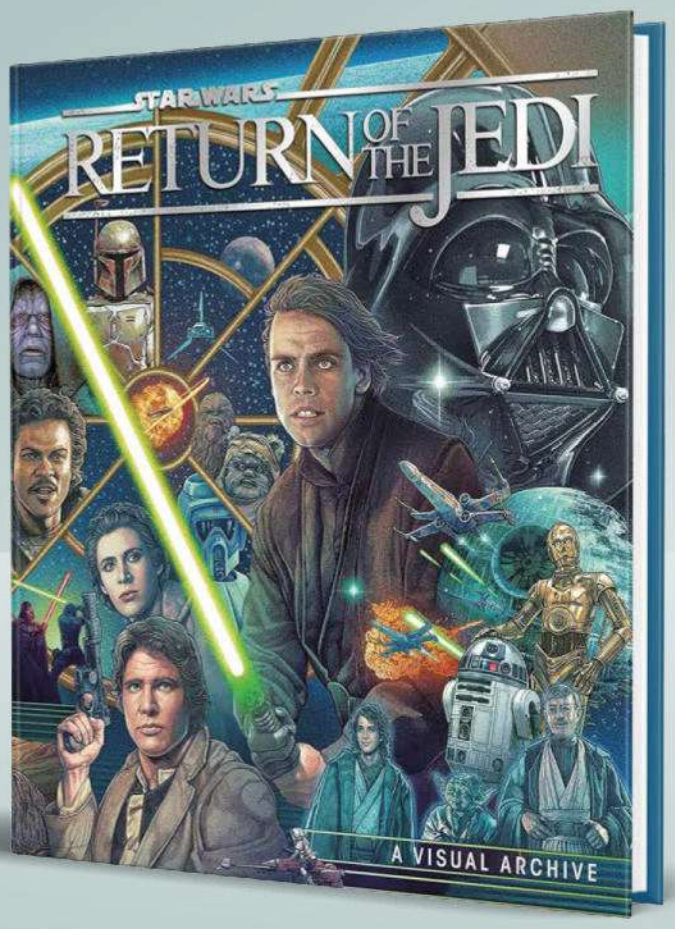
Soar through space with a garment tailored for any rebel

The colorful symbols and flight suits worn by the Rebel Alliance's pilots became so associated with freedom that they were later adopted by the Resistance in its struggle against the First Order. The Rebel Pilot Vest from Heroes & Villains evokes this spirit through its reflective piping accents, nylon paneling, and overall design.

The words "Rebel Alliance" are embroidered in Aurebesh around a Rebel crest patch on the back of the 100% polyester polar fleece vest, and "Pull To Inflate" — a vital direction for any pilot in distress — is written on the front pocket. Head over to **HeroesVillains.com**, where you can obtain your Rebel Pilot Vest for $95.

Book Club

Jokes, Jedi, and classic comic art feature in the latest *Star Wars* releases.



The New Jedi Archive!

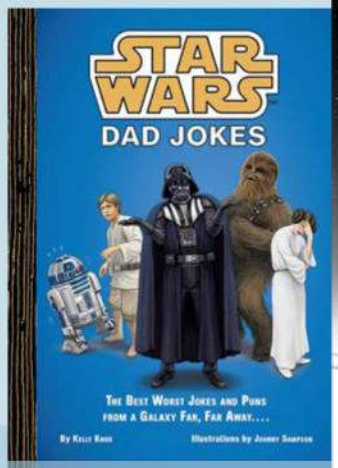
Insight Editions' in-depth celebration of the original trilogy finale.

***Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983) may have been the final chapter of the first *Star Wars* trilogy, but it provided a launchpad for themes that are still being explored in *Star Wars* storytelling to this day.**

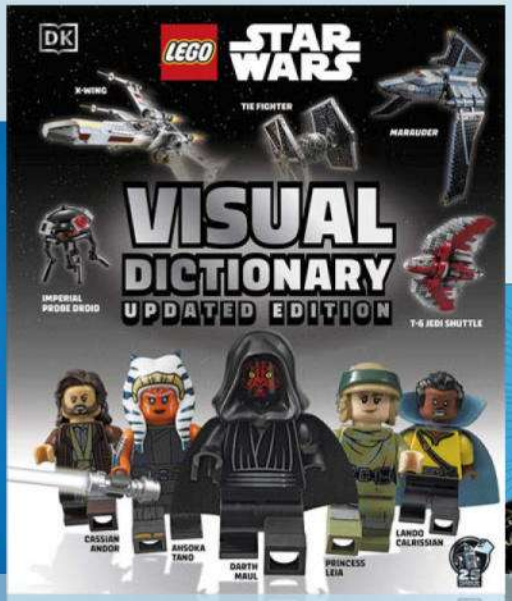
To celebrate the 40-plus years since it's theatrical release, Insight Editions have created *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi: A Visual Archive*, a 306-page deluxe coffee-table volume, as the ultimate tribute to the movie. And as we've come to expect from Insight, the book offers readers a mammoth journey into every aspect of the film, featuring a wealth of photography and concept art alongside anecdotes covering the film's production. It thoroughly explores the legacy of *Return of the Jedi*, from spin-off novels, comics, and merchandise, to its influence on modern stories such as *The Mandalorian*, *The Book of Boba Fett*, *The Clone Wars*, and more. The text (written by a notable roster of contributors) is informative and well-researched, and there is extra fun to be had in the *Archive*'s numerous inserts, which include booklets, fold-out sections, and other interactive features. What's more, the Ewoks get some love in pages covering the post-*Jedi* TV movies *Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure* and *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor*, and the animated Ewoks television show.

Available in bookstores on April 23, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi: A Visual Archive* is a rewarding tribute to the capstone of the original *Star Wars* trilogy, and a must-have for every fan's bookshelf.

01



02



03

01

Star Wars: Dad Jokes

Why do the warriors of Mandalore leave their helmets on? Because it's *Mandator-ian*!

If you're a geeky father, pun lover, or sci-fi fan with a better sense of humor than Darth Vader, then *Star Wars: Dad Jokes* is the book you've been looking for. Written by Kelly Knox, the sides of this charmingly corny book are splitting with the best worst jokes and puns from the galaxy far, far away. Featuring equally jokey illustrations by Johnny Sampson, this very silly blend of groan-inducing gags is guaranteed to cause giggles or, at the very least, eyes to roll in intergalactic wonder. Published by Chronicle Books, *Star Wars: Dad Jokes* is on sale now.

02

LEGO® *Star Wars: Visual Dictionary Updated Edition*

Celebrating 25 years of LEGO® *Star Wars*, and fully updated for 2024, the latest edition of the LEGO® *Star Wars Visual Dictionary* from DK explores the galaxy far, far away from a unique and fun brick-built perspective. Packed with fascinating details, trivia, and stunning photos of favorite sets and vehicles, you'll find everything you need to know about the long-running range in this essential guide. In addition to fan-favorite sets and minifigures, the book covers new ones, including Ahsoka Tano's T-6 Jedi Shuttle from *Star Wars: Ahsoka* and the Razor Crest from *Star Wars: The Mandalorian*. Suitable for younger fans and grown-up collectors alike, the book also goes behind the scenes with the team at LEGO® *Star Wars* and comes with an exclusive Darth Maul minifigure! In stores now.

03

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (A Collector's Classic Board Book)

An epic retelling of the movie that turned an exciting space fantasy into a galaxy-spanning saga, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (A Collector's Classic Board Book)* allows art from award-winning comics icon Al Williamson to shine in an engaging new format.

From the Rebel Alliance's defense of their hidden base on the ice planet Hoth, to Luke Skywalker's training under Jedi Master Yoda in the murky swamps of Dagobah, to the jaw-dropping finale on Cloud City, this collector's board book is the perfect gift for every generation of *Star Wars* fan. Published by Abrams Appleseed and available on April 30.

Comics Roundup

Veteran Jedi and rookie Padawans keep the peace in this month's *Star Wars* comics

A Sith Assassin Unleashed

Palpatine's apprentice pushes his limits in *Darth Maul: Black, White & Red* #1

The 25th anniversary of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* is the perfect time to feature Darth Maul — one of the most iconic villains in cinematic history — in his very own Marvel Comics miniseries.

Each issue in the four-part *Darth Maul: Black, White & Red* will deliver a powerhouse standalone story, with new superstar creative teams joining for each installment. In issue #1, writer Ben Percy and artist Stefano Raffaele show what happens when a prison ship transporting dangerous members of the Final Occulation cult suddenly vanishes from scanners.

When Darth Sidious dispatches his apprentice to investigate, Maul finds that the stricken vessel contains the stuff of nightmares. The Sith Lord must push back this chaotic tide, so that his master's plans for the fate of the galaxy can come to fruition.

Darth Maul: Black, White & Red builds on the success of 2023's *Darth Vader: Black, White & Red*, which channeled previous Marvel hits (such as *Wolverine: Black, White, and Blood*) into the visual language of the galaxy far, far away. Through a monochromatic color palette judiciously enhanced with splashes of crimson, the artwork emphasizes tense environments and shocking outbursts of violence.

"My mind is busy with nightmares," Percy told StarWars.com, "So it's a special treat to step into the mind of Darth Maul. I've always loved blending genres, and horror and science fiction make for great bedfellows. The dark, cold void of space invites awe and terror. We're leaning into that."

Featuring a cover by Alex Maleev, *Darth Maul: Black, White, & Red* #1 is in stores now.

(Above) Star Wars: Darth Maul: Black, White & Red #1 Ben Harvey Variant

Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures

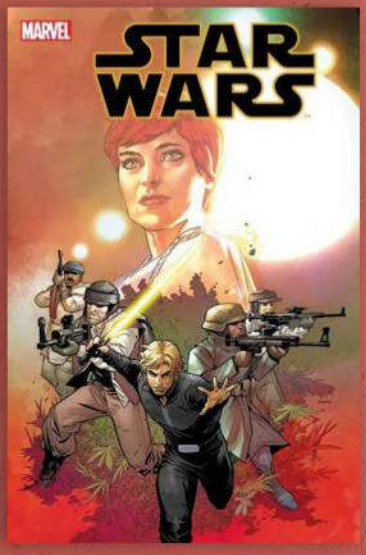
While visiting your favorite comics shop on May 4's Free Comic Book Day, be sure to pick up this standalone adventure set during the era of the High Republic! Written by Daniel José Older with art by Andy Duggan, this tale from Dark Horse Comics stars Nubs, the furry Pooba Jedi trainee who stars in the Disney+ animated series *Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures*. In "Sky Parade Rescue!" Nubs experiences one of his most stressful outings as a Jedi initiate, alongside other students who have earned the favor of Master Yoda including the Aloxian Padawan called Qort.

The Phantom Menace 25th Anniversary Special #1

Marvel Comics is celebrating the quarter-century milestone of the theatrical release of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* with an all-new one-shot, written by Greg Pak and featuring interior illustrations by Will Sliney.

In this multifaceted character study, prequel fans will discover the secret inner life of Anakin Skywalker in a tale set before, during, and after the events of the 1999 blockbuster, exploring the dreams of a Jedi, the love of a mother, a Tusken Raider's gift, and the heart of a Gungan. On sale May 1.

Star Wars #46



From writer Charles Soule comes the latest installment of Marvel's flagship *Star Wars* series, which continues to fill the blanks between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*.

In *Star Wars* #46, Leia Organa stages a desperate mission to save Rebel commander Mon Mothma from dire peril, but now the future of the entire Alliance hinges on the fate of Lando Calrissian—accused of being a traitor! If Lando falls, what will it mean for the Rebel Alliance and its survival? Illustrated by Madibek Musabekov with a cover by Stephen Segovia, *Star Wars* #46 is on sale May 22.

Mace Windu #4 (of 4)

In the final issue of the Marvel limited series, legendary Jedi warrior Mace Windu confronts an enigmatic adversary to prevent a revolutionary energy source from falling into the wrong hands! This adventure, set prior to the Clone Wars, teams Windu with the rogue pirate Azita Cruuz for a faceoff with The Shroud: a cult leader who represents everything that Mace Windu doesn't believe in, and who just might be capable of pushing Windu to his breaking point! *Star Wars: Mace Windu* #4, written by Marc Bernardin and illustrated by Georges Jeanty, is on sale May 15.

Incoming

Don't Miss These Upcoming Releases

MAY

***Darth Vader* #46**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Greg Pak
Artist: Raffaele Ienco
Cover Artist: Leinil Francis Yu

***Darth Maul: Black, White & Red* #2**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Mark Russell
Artist: Carlos Nieto
Cover Artist: Tyler Kirkham

***Jango Fett* #3**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Ethan Sacks
Artist: Luke Ross
Cover Artist: Leinil Francis Yu

JUNE

***Star Wars* #47**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Charles Soule
Artist: Madibek Musabekov
Cover Artist: Stephen Segovia

***Star Wars: Obi-Wan Kenobi* Trade Paperback**
Marvel Comics
Writer: Jody Houser
Artist: Salvador Larroca
Cover Artist: Phil Noto

STAR WARS THE HIGH REPUBLIC

Luminous Lore

Shining a light on *Star Wars: The High Republic.*

The Jedi Strike Back

Avar Kriss and Elzar Mann reunited!

Star Wars: The High Republic: Temptation of the Force **is Tessa Gratton's thrilling sequel to *The Eye of Darkness*, in which the Jedi attempt to finally turn the tide against the Nihil.**

Following her audacious escape from the Occlusion Zone, Avar Kriss is finally reunited with Elzar Mann after being separated for a year. No longer willing to deny the bond that drew them back together, the Jedi duo devise a plan to liberate the planet Naboo and return hope to those still trapped behind the Stormwall. Joined by Jedi Knights Bell Zettifar, Burryaga, and Vernestra Rwoh, they embark upon a hunt for the Nihil's dangerous leader, Marchion Ro, but to find him they will have to face the Nameless terrors that have previoulsy proven impossible to stop. Published by Random House Worlds and on sale June 11.

Republic Roundup

(Excluding Comics & Manga)

PHASE I

Light of the Jedi
Writer: Charles Soule
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

A Test of Courage
Writer: Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

The Great Jedi Rescue
Writer: Cavan Scott
Artist: Petur Antonsson
Disney Lucasfilm Press, 8x8 storybook

Into the Dark
Writer: Claudia Gray
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

The Rising Storm
Writer: Cavan Scott
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

Race to Crashpoint Tower
Writer: Daniel José Older
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

Out of the Shadows
Writer: Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

Tempest Runner
Writer: Cavan Scott
Random House Worlds, Audio original novel

Showdown at the Fair
Writer: George Mann
Artist: Petur Antonsson
Disney Lucasfilm Press, 8x8 storybook

Mission to Disaster
Writer: Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

The Fallen Star
Writer: Claudia Gray
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

The Battle for Starlight
Writer: George Mann
Artist: Petur Antonsson
Disney Lucasfilm Press, 8x8 storybook

Midnight Horizon
Writer: Daniel José Older
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

PHASE II

Path of Deceit
Writers: Justina Ireland and Tessa Gratton
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

Quest for the Hidden City
Writer: George Mann
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Middle Grade novel

Convergence
Writer: Zoraida Córdova
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

The Battle of Jedha
Writer: George Mann
Random House Worlds, Audio original novel

Cataclysm
Writer: Lydia Kang
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

Quest for Planet X
Writer: Tessa Gratton
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

PHASE III

The Eye of Darkness
Writer: George Mann
Random House Worlds, Adult novel

Escape from Valo
Writers: Daniel José Older and Alyssa Wong
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

Defy the Storm
Writers: Tessa Gratton and Justina Ireland
Disney Lucasfilm Press, Young Adult novel

INCOMING COMICS

The High Republic #7
Marvel Comics
Writer: Cavan Scott
Artist: Marika Cresta
Cover: Phil Noto
On sale: May 1

The High Republic Adventures #6
Dark Horse Comics
Writer: Daniel José Older
Artists: Harvey Tolibao (pencils) and LeBeau Underwood (inks)
Cover: Harvey Tolibao
On sale: May 15

The High Republic Adventures: Saber for Hire #2
Dark Horse Comics
Writer: Cavan Scott
Artist & Cover: Rachael Stott
On sale: May 15

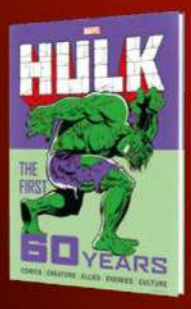
CELEBRATE 60 YEARS OF MARVEL'S AVENGERS!

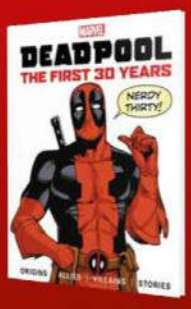
Featuring Iron Man, Captain America, the Hulk, Hawkeye, the Vision, Scarlet Witch, Black Panther, Quicksilver, and many more!

Lavishly illustrated with stunning art, this must-have tribute also includes profiles of the talented creators behind the team's ongoing adventures!

Available in the US and Canada.

ALSO AVAILABLE





AVAILABLE FROM ALL GOOD BOOKSTORES AND ONLINE:

WWW.TITAN-COMICS.COM

© 2024 MARVEL

Faith, Fervor, & Fantasy

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, devotees of all ages reminisce on the fandom-rocking lead-up to the movie's release.

WORDS: CHELSEA ZUKOWSKI

On May 19, 1999, fans flocked to movie theaters to see *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, the first *Star Wars* movie in 16 years and the beginning of a much-heralded trilogy of new films from creator George Lucas. It's arrival, along with the preceding marketing campaign, was a pivotal moment in pop-culture history and one that would forever change *Star Wars* fandom.

Tyler Trautman, a fan from Oregon, recalls the atmosphere of the time. "All of a sudden, *Star Wars* was as big as the galaxy it was set in. You could see it. You could feel it. This was a real story, a piece of history," he recalls.

"It was a great time to be a *Star Wars* fan," Danielle Wright, also from Oregon, remembers. "I have never seen a fandom experience since like the run-up to *The Phantom Menace*. It was the best."

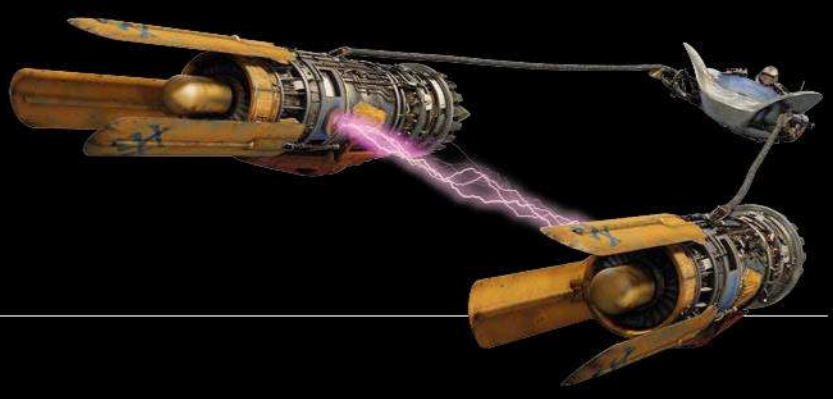
The sense of anticipation was palpable, with fans turning to the emergent internet for any tidbit of information while the film was in production, and opportunities for every kind of tie-in marketing being explored long before the film's release. The world was more than ready for a new chapter in the *Star Wars* story.

May the Force be With You

The fervor for *The Phantom Menace* began in October 1993, when George Lucas announced in *Variety* magazine that he was creating a new *Star Wars* trilogy that would explore the events leading up to the original three films.

Prior to release, it had been more than a decade and a half since the evil Galactic Empire's demise in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, but rather than explore what happened next, Lucas opted to rewind his world to a beginning that had previously only been hinted at, revealing Darth Vader's origins. He planned to expand the saga of the Skywalker family within a thrilling political space opera that told the story of how and why the Republic and the Jedi Order fell.

The Phantom Menace would introduce us to Anakin Skywalker, a nine-year-old boy obsessed with podracing who dreamed of a better life. A series of right-place-right-time moments led the boy to meet two Jedi Knights and a young queen, propelling him onto a path that would reset the status quo of the galaxy. We would also meet a younger Obi-Wan Kenobi as a Jedi Padawan, learning the ways of the Force from one of the greatest Jedi of the age. And the Galactic Republic was alive, if not exactly kicking, increasingly weighed under by corruption and stagnation



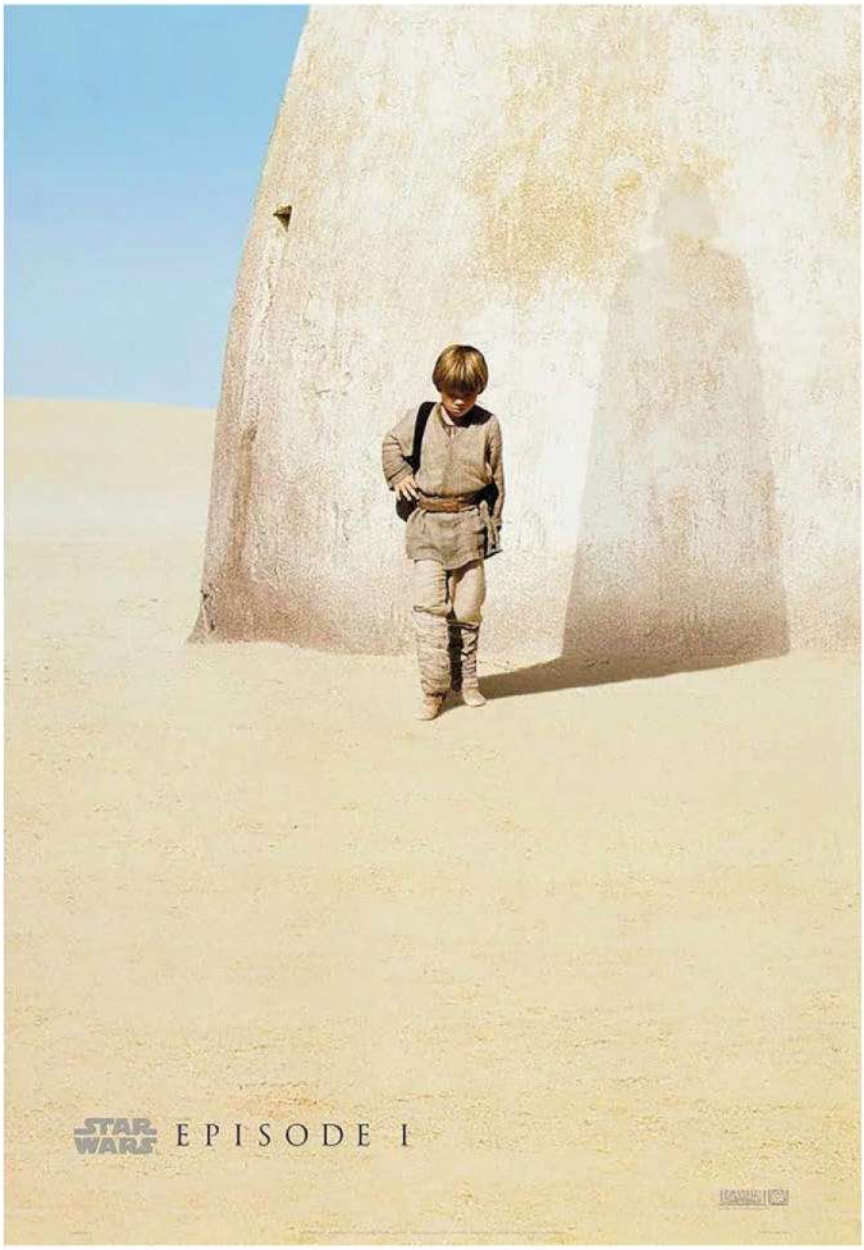
as it tried to manage the galaxy's thousands of planetary systems.

By 1999, leading up to movie's May release, Lucas was doing interviews with nearly every major media outlet, from *Vanity Fair* and *TIME* magazine to CBS *60 minutes* and *The New York Times*.

"The *60 Minutes* interview in particular was very exciting to see," says Colorado-based John Mendez. "It really showed the scale at which Lucas was working. It was astounding. We were seeing a true revolution in filmmaking."

For overseas fans, like those in the U.K., the wait for the new movie would be even longer — three months longer, in fact. "We had to hold on until July to see *The Phantom Menace*, so we soaked up anything we could get," says English fan Jonny Mayner. "The *Vanity Fair* issue with those Annie Leibowitz photos was a big deal for me and my friends. I also remember that one of the biggest weekend newspapers in the U.K., *The Sunday Times*, dedicated an entire issue of its weekend color supplement to the film. I devoured every interview and article, again and again and again."

Fans poured over exclusive photos and sneak-peek morsels of information, but few things elicited the culture-defining fervor like the release of the first full trailer for the movie, while the initial poster, released in November 1998, teased audiences with a now-iconic image of young Anakin Skywalker on Tatooine casting the shadow of Darth Vader behind him.



01 The teaser one-sheet for *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* made fans hungry to know more.

"I was so young that every little thing about the movie was captivating to me. My imagination ran wild. I remember thinking that if I tried hard enough, I'd be able to use the Force one day."

Brandon Dold, Nevada

"That 'Vader shadow' poster remains ingrained in my memory," reflects Adam Christopher, author of *Star Wars: Shadow of the Sith*, adding, "It's probably the best movie-poster design in history."

You Will Learn Patience

When the trailer hit in 75 theaters across the United States and Canada, media outlets reported people lining up for tickets, sitting down to watch it, and then immediately leaving. This undoubtedly boosted the box-office take for films such as *Meet Joe Black*, *The Waterboy*, and *The Siege*. In fact, several theaters cannily showed the trailer *after* the main feature, meaning fans would actually have to stick around to watch the movie they'd bought a ticket for. "On November 18, 1998, I drove

"I remember seeing Darth Maul for the first time and not even being afraid. I was three!"

Noah Matthew, North Carolina

02

30 minutes to see the teaser-trailer premiere at one of the U.S. theaters that showed it," says Californian Dave McKew. "I bought tickets for both *The Waterboy* and *Meet Joe Black* so I could watch the trailer twice. I was blown away. I'll never forget the mysterious creatures walking out of the fog in that first shot."

While in 1998 there was no such thing as YouTube through which to stream trailers on demand, outlets iTunes and StarWars.com made the trailer available online as downloadable QuickTime and AVI files. Demand crashed servers, and fans had to be prepared for a long wait as the dial-up internet connections of the time were no match for today's broadband speeds.

Mike Chen, author of *Star Wars: Brotherhood,* remembers how he and his roommate watched the trailer alongside *Meet Joe Black* at the theater and later downloaded it in low-resolution Quicktime format so they could play it over and over again.

"It was a strange feeling to watch, because whilst it *felt* like *Star Wars,* it also seemed so new and very different, and that's something that I don't think modern fandom has to grapple with," Chen suggests. "As someone who always ate up lore, just from watching the trailer something shifted in my brain as I suddenly grasped we were going to get a much wider context to the original trilogy."

02 Darth Maul was an instant hit as soon as he appeared in the movie's trailer.

03 The murkey, fog-filled first shot from the teaser trailer.

03

The second trailer, released in March 1999, was met with even more fan zeal, introducing Liam Neeson's Qui-Gon Jinn, Ewan McGregor's Obi-Wan Kenobi, ▸

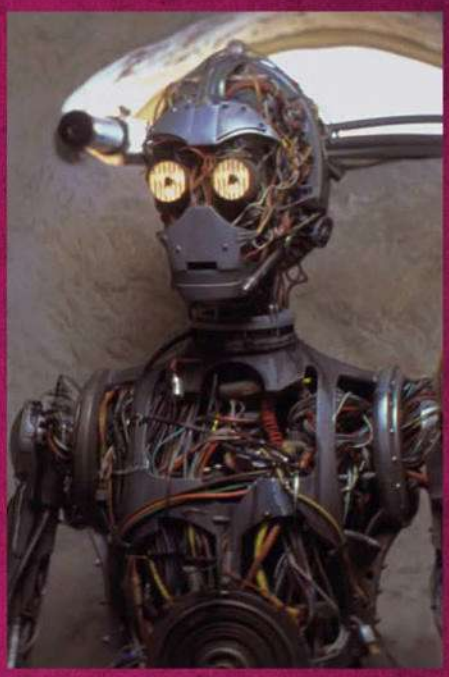
LIGHT SIDE LEGACY

The ongoing phenomenon that is *Star Wars* Celebration, which has hosted 15 fan events around the world since it first took place in Denver in April 1999, was originally conceived as a literal celebration of the return of *Star Wars* to the silver screen.

"I flew more than 1,500 miles to attend the original *Star Wars* Celebration in Denver," says Dave McKew. "By that point, *The Phantom Menace* hype was at fever pitch, and it was so amazing to stand in the rain on a muddy airfield with like-minded fans who had traveled far and wide to get an advanced glimpse inside a film we could not wait for. I had to leave Celebration a few hours early on the final day just so that I could be back in New Jersey for *The Phantom Menace* merch release at midnight."

04

05



and Natalie Portman's Queen Amidala. Downloaded more than one million times in 24 hours, it quickly became the most viewed trailer in movie history before being dethroned by *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2000) a year later.

04 Natalie Portman as Queen Amidala.

05 Anthony Daniels returned to the saga to play C-3PO.

> ***"I got see the movie as a school field trip. I loved it so much that I hid in the theater to rewatch it over and over until I got caught."***
>
> **Heather Antos, New York**

Your Focus Determines Your Reality

Before fans even got to see Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan escape a Trade Federation starship or duel a powerful Sith Lord on screen, the world was inundated with *The Phantom Menace* promotional merchandise. An advertising campaign budget of $20 million, and licensing deals with major toy, food and drink companies, made certain the upcoming movie was on everyone's "To Watch" list. Tricon Global Restaurants (which operated KFC, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut) and PepsiCo offered meals with collectible character cups and toys, and emblazoned character art on cans of Pepsi and Mountain Dew.

06

06 Jar Jar Binks (Ahmed Best) was a huge hit with younger fans.

"I remember going to our local Wal-Mart and seeing the aisle filled with *Star Wars* toys from end to end," says New York resident Davor Mondom. "I especially remember the KFC/Taco Bell/Pizza Hut campaign, where each restaurant had toys from one of the three planets in the movie."

"I was between seven and ten years old when the original trilogy came out, so a lot of nostalgic feelings came back," McKew says. "I found myself collecting the new action figures from Habsro, and I remember collecting the soda cans from the grocery store and the cup toppers from Pizza Hut, KFC, and Taco Bell."

Retailers hosted "Midnight Madness" merchandise releases just weeks before *The Phantom Menace* premiered. Fans lined up for hours at stores likes Toys R Us to snag action figures, N-1 starfighters, Queen Amidala dolls, lightsabers and more, from leading toy licensees Hasbro and LEGO.

"I remember feeling like a kid again," admits Jason Marcucilli, who was 25 at the time.

Dan Zehr, from Illinois, recalls racing into Toys R Us at midnight to snag *The Phantom Menace* action figures. "There were people with shopping carts who pushed

07

08

past us and filled them up with rows of figures," he laughs.

Chris Davis, who was 14 when *The Phantom Menace* arrived in the U.K., confides that he and his friends concocted intricate plans to convince their parents to take them to multiple stores to feed their collections as soon as stock arrived on British soil. "I remember it was big news when the toy line was released, with the frenzy to obtain the coveted Darth Maul 3 3/4-inch action figure," says Davis. "That was our mission, and we weren't going to be defeated."

07 Director George Lucas (left) with Jake Lloyd (Anakin Skywalker, right).

08 Frank Oz returned to voice Yoda for the movie.

09 The hi-octane podrace wowed audiences.

Fortunately for their parents, they only had to visit one store to secure their treasure, thanks to the kindness of an employee who had "forgotten" to open the box of action figures. "My friend reached in and straight away pulled out a Darth Maul," says Davis. "His reaction was a mixture of shock and excitement, so much so that he only managed to squeak 'Darth Maul' in a strange voice. Mission accomplished."

> ***"It hit at a very specific time in the pop-culture landscape, that glorious era before the internet. Looking back, it all feels so nostalgic and makes me yearn for simpler times."***
>
> **Jason Munoz, California**

The Chosen One

What with Midnight Madness, trailers, too much junk food, and scouring the fledgling World Wide Web for movie stills and story scoops, *Star Wars* fans had experienced the first flush of modern-day movie marketing, and all this before they finally got to sit in a theater and heard John Williams' majestic *Star Wars* theme. By the time May 19, 1999, had rolled around, the first prequel film had become one of the most anticipated releases in movie history.

As had happened with the trailers and toys, fans lined up outside theaters to buy advance tickets. News outlets reported some fans waited for days so they could be guaranteed a ticket when they went on sale on May 12. With the film releasing a week later, many ▶

> ***"The hype was unbelievably intense, as there had been a 16-year drought of Star Wars films. 'Duel of the Fates' sound cuts were appearing in media previews everywhere. It was so exciting!"***
>
> **James Min, California**

09

fans waited hours and even camped outside theaters so they could snag a good seat for midnight showings.

"I stood in line for tickets with my friends and all day on opening night to get the worst seats in the theater," grins Tyler Trautman. "Front row. I didn't care. The theater was electric; old fans returning to their homeland after years of VHS and books, and new fans in attendance knowing they were about to experience something important. It was like feeling the Force flowing through you. There was not a person in the theater not feeling it."

For *Star Wars* author Beth Revis, who grew up in a "small, rural Appalachian area," seeing the new film "all huge and real, made me fall in love with *Star Wars* again," she says. "Seeing *The Phantom Menace* was the moment where I realized there was a whole fandom community. It was the point where I didn't feel alone for liking *Star Wars*."

Children were in awe of the thrilling podracing scene and characters like the affable Jar Jar Binks. Older fans likewise loved the Boonta Eve Classic and seeing Jedi Knights, masters and Padawans, in their prime.

For fans like Becca Benjamin, who was 24 at the time, seeing standout characters like Shmi Skywalker and Padmé Amidala was a revelation. "Learning that the Skywalkers had a matriarch was a pretty big deal in my book," she explains. "As a new mother myself at the time, I connected right away. I really gravitated toward Shmi and her relationship with Anakin."

"It is still one of my favorite theater experiences of my life, and I'm 43 years old," concludes Danielle Wright. "People cheered when the fanfare happened. People cheered at familiar characters. People cheered at new characters. People brought toy lightsabers and dressed up and it was a beautiful, fun, unforgettable communal experience."

10

11

10 The movie's original theatrical one-sheet.

11 The 25th anniversary one-sheet by artist Matt Ferguson.

12 Liam Neeson as Qui-Gon Jinn.

"I felt like the prequel movies were my Star Wars movies. My dad had the original trilogy, and I got to have the prequel trilogy."

Linwood Sharp, South Jersey

12

"Seeing how special these characters were to my dad made them inherently special to me as a young kid, too — something I cannot wait to experience with my own daughter when she's old enough."

Kir Manda, California

Five Copies to Give Away!

The Empire Strikes Out!

Star Wars: Return of the Jedi 40th Anniversary Special Edition to be won!

Four decades after it's theatrical release, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* remains one of the best-loved installments in George Lucas' galactic space opera.

Star Wars: Return of the Jedi: The 40th Anniversary Special Edition from Titan Comics takes a deep dive into the story behind the groundbreaking movie, exploring the critically acclaimed box-office smash hit that marked the closing chapter of the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

The final episode of the saga (at least at that time), *Return of the Jedi* was tasked with resolving the revelations of its two predecessors and bringing the story of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, and Han Solo's battle against the Empire to a conclusion. It succeeded in not only wrapping up the trilogy, but also delivered some dramatic revelations too.

This deluxe special edition takes you behind the scenes of the making of the classic movie, featuring on-set interviews with the cast and crew, rarely seen production photos, and original concept art, as it explores the film's journey from early ideas to the silver screen.

To be in with a chance of winning one of five copies of this expansive book, just send us the correct answer to this *Star Wars* trivia question:

Which Imperial was in command of the second Death Star?

A. Moff Jolli Jocular
B. Moff Terri Judoon
C. Moff Tiaan Jerjerrod

Send your answer via email to **insidercomp@titanemail.com** or our usual postal address (see 'Contact Us' on page 3), marked "ROTJ SPECIAL!" by July 15, 2024. Terms and conditions are available at titanmagazines.com

May the Force be with you!

www.titan-comics.com

© and TM 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

01 Billy Dee Williams as Lando Calrissian in a publicity photo for *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

Billy Dee Williams

"What Have We Here?"

Lando Calrissian actor Billy Dee Williams speaks to *Insider* about his life, his beliefs, and his *Star Wars* adventure.

WORDS: JOHN KIRK

Billy Dee Williams grew up in Harlem, New York, in the 1940s. A swinging, upscale neighborhood at that time, with a vibrant arts scene, it's little wonder that the future actor would be drawn to pursue a creative life. His mother was a trained opera singer who worked as a stenographer for famed Broadway producer, Max Gordon. It was Gordon who gave Williams his first stage role, at the tender age of eight. That left him with a powerful impression that he'd found himself exactly "where the universe wanted me."

"I would say that I'm a spiritual kind of a fellow," Williams says of his beliefs. "My family were somewhere between the religious and the spiritual, and there is a distinction. Spirituality isn't necessarily about a single religion, but about what you believe. My first realization of the true power of prayer was when my sister was very sick, very ill. She was a wonderful individual. I was still a little boy, and I got down on my knees and started praying. I kept repeating the Lord's Prayer, and she got better."

This connection with universal forces stayed with Williams into adulthood. "I became very much interested in eastern philosophy," he says. "A lot of my beliefs come out of such experiences. You can't go back, and you can't go forward, so you learn to appreciate the moment."

One such moment that Williams remembers to this day was meeting the legendary composer and jazz pianist Duke Ellington.

"He was a very charming person," remembers Williams. "He and his father used to compete with each other to see who could be the most charming. Ellington had a way about him—all of the guys of that generation did. He used to make every woman feel like they were the only person in the room. I always wanted to play Ellington. I always felt I was the only guy who could have pulled it off," he chuckles.

Another influence on the young Williams was his "Grand-Mommy," a powerful role model who epitomized the values of style and propriety. He remembers she would frequently burst into renditions of *Rule, Britannia!* never shy of reminding people of her British citizenship. It was his grandmother who always made sure that he and his sister were always dressed in the finest fashions, unwittingly preparing Williams for his most famous role.

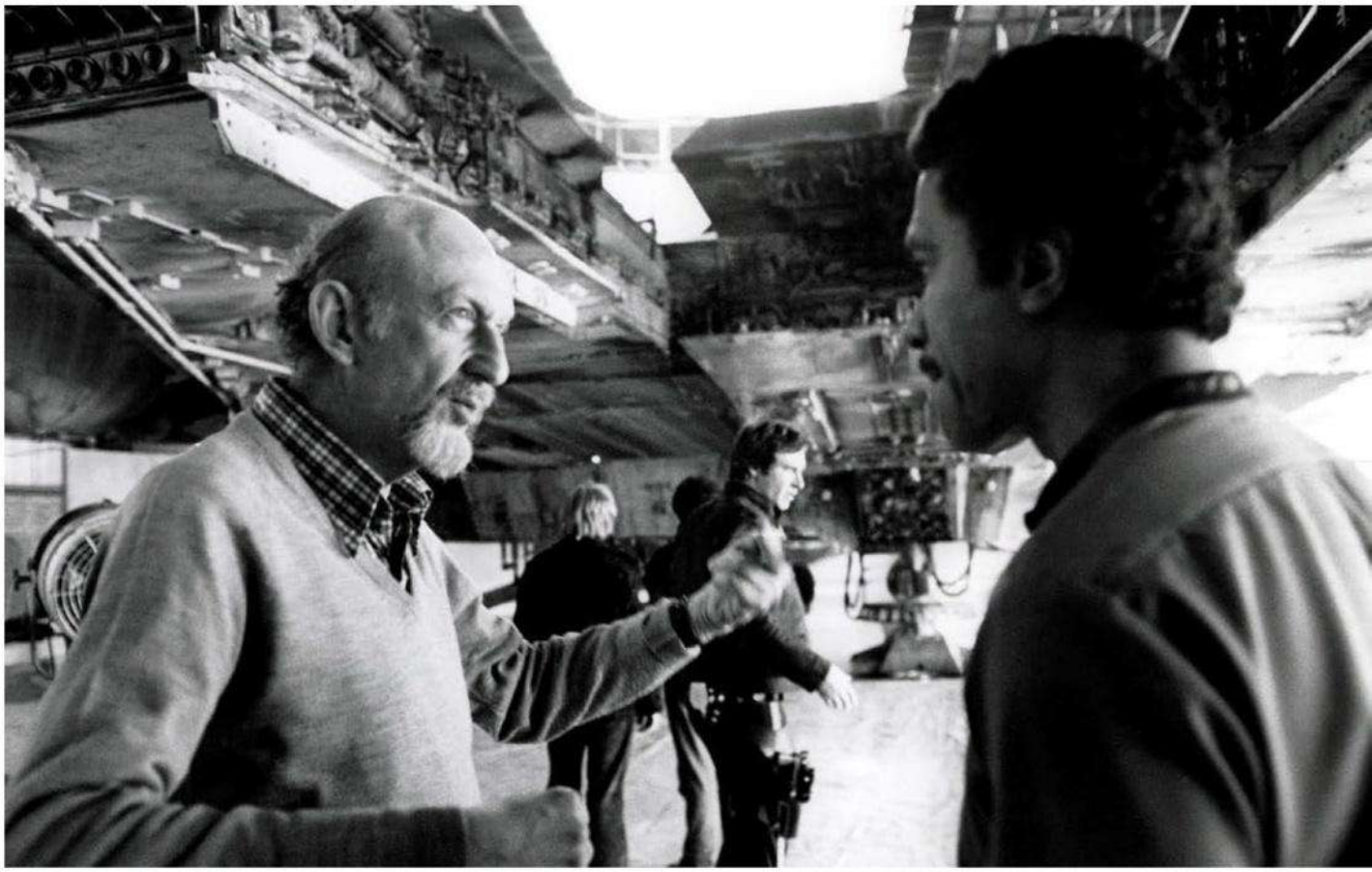
02

03

02 Scoundrels Lando Calrissian (Williams) and Han Solo (Harrison Ford).

03 Williams asserts that Lando had to make tough decisions to protect the residents of Cloud City.

04 *The Empire Strikes Back* director Irvin Kershner (left) with Williams (right).



04

UNLUCKY LANDO

Lando Calrissian had a tricky hand to play when Darth Vader arrived at Cloud City to lay a trap for Luke Skywalker. Billy Dee Williams explains what was going through his character's mind:
"I've run into people who think Lando's relationship with Han Solo is betrayal, and I've found myself having to explain that he was up against Darth Vader, Boba Fett, and the whole of the Empire," says Williams. "He had to figure out how to preserve his situation, to save his city. In the final analysis, the question I ask is, "*Did anybody die?*" Lando was trying to prevent the complete demise of Han Solo and his friends, so he had to figure out something!"

"You can't go back, and you can't go forward, so you learn to appreciate the moment."

The Calrissian Chronicles

There is perhaps more than a dash of the charm of Duke Ellington and his peers in Williams' portrayal of Lando Calrissian, the scoundrel with *savoir faire* that he originated for *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and to which he returned in 2019's *The Rise of Skywalker*. One could argue that the character isn't too far removed from Williams himself.

05

06

"I am Lando Calrissian, and he is me. He is Billy Dee," the actor happily admits. "It's difficult for me to separate myself from that character. I wanted Lando to be wonderful as soon as I first heard his name."

According to Williams, Calrissian is a name with Armenian origins in the real world, ▶

05 Lando (Williams) with Princess Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher) in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983)

06 Calrissian at the controls of the *Millennium Falcon*.

07

07 Williams (right) on the *Millennium Falcon* set with Mark Hamill and Carrie Fisher.

08 Lando feels the full extent of Chewbacca's anger.

09 Lando Calrissian (Williams) made a triumphant return in the finale of The Skywalker Saga.

which gave him inspiration for some of his choices in playing the role. "It seemed there was a lot of ethnic, cultural background to play with. I decided to take advantage of that and create something that went beyond the question of ethnicity and make Lando someone bigger than life," he explains. "And, of course, the cape! The cape became such a valuable and iconic part of the presentation."

Calrissian provided a counterpoint to Han Solo, a sophisticated success story to Harrison Ford's scruffy looking nerf herder.

09

08

Of his *Star Wars* co-stars, Williams is nothing less than effusive. "Harrison and I are still very good friends," he reveals. "And Carrie Fisher was one of the most brilliant people I've ever met in my life. She was a funny woman. We were as close to each other as anyone could be."

Asked what he would choose as the most memorable moment from his three *Star Wars* movies, Williams was quick to answer. "Getting choked by Chewbacca was a pretty big Lando moment," he laughs. "In all the years I've been acting, I'd never had anyone choke me before!"

As iconic as it was, playing Lando Calrissian in the *Star Wars* saga was just one role in a long and distinguished stage and screen career, and Williams has devoted much of his time to painting since the late 1980s. "I've lived a very eclectic life," he says. "I'm a painter and I've learned a lot about the use of color. I always think in terms of the full spectrum. It allows for a better perspective— to see things as they are, in full color, and that makes moments seem more alive, less combative. There are always unique moments in life that we should embrace and talk about. It's been an interesting journey."

10 Williams reprised the role of Lando Calrissian in *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2018).

"I've lived a very eclectic life."

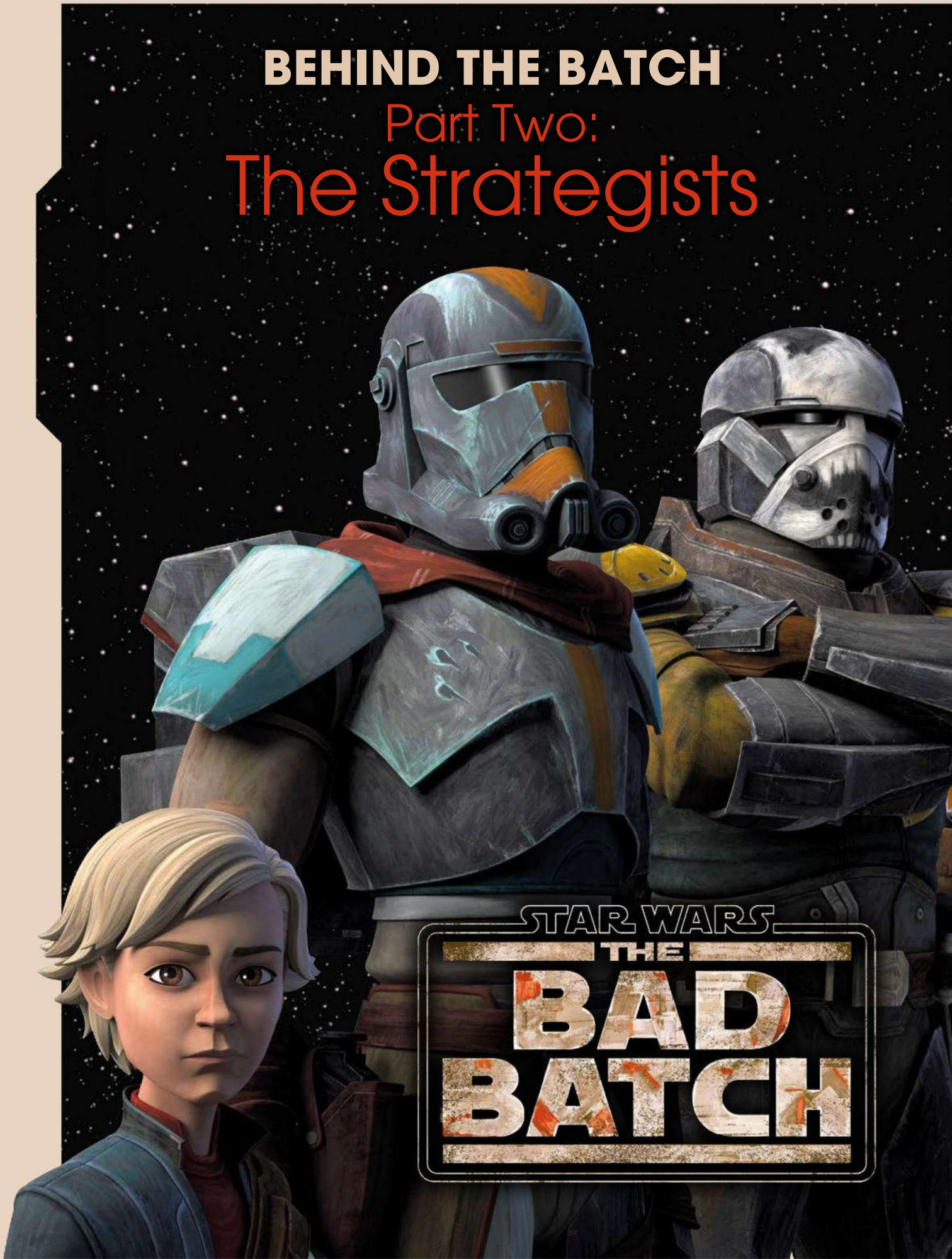
BEYOND THE BIG SCREEN

Billy Dee Williams not only portrayed Lando Calrissian in three *Star Wars* movies, he has lent his voice to a variety of projects away from the silver screen. He reprised the character in multiple animated series, including *Star Wars Rebels*, and LEGO *Star Wars*, and the radio adaptations of both *The Empire Strikes Back* and the *Dark Empire* comic-book series. You'll also hear Calrissian's smooth talking aboard Disney Parks' *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue*, videogames, and even in *Robot Chicken* spoofs of the movie saga.

BEHIND THE BATCH

Part Two:

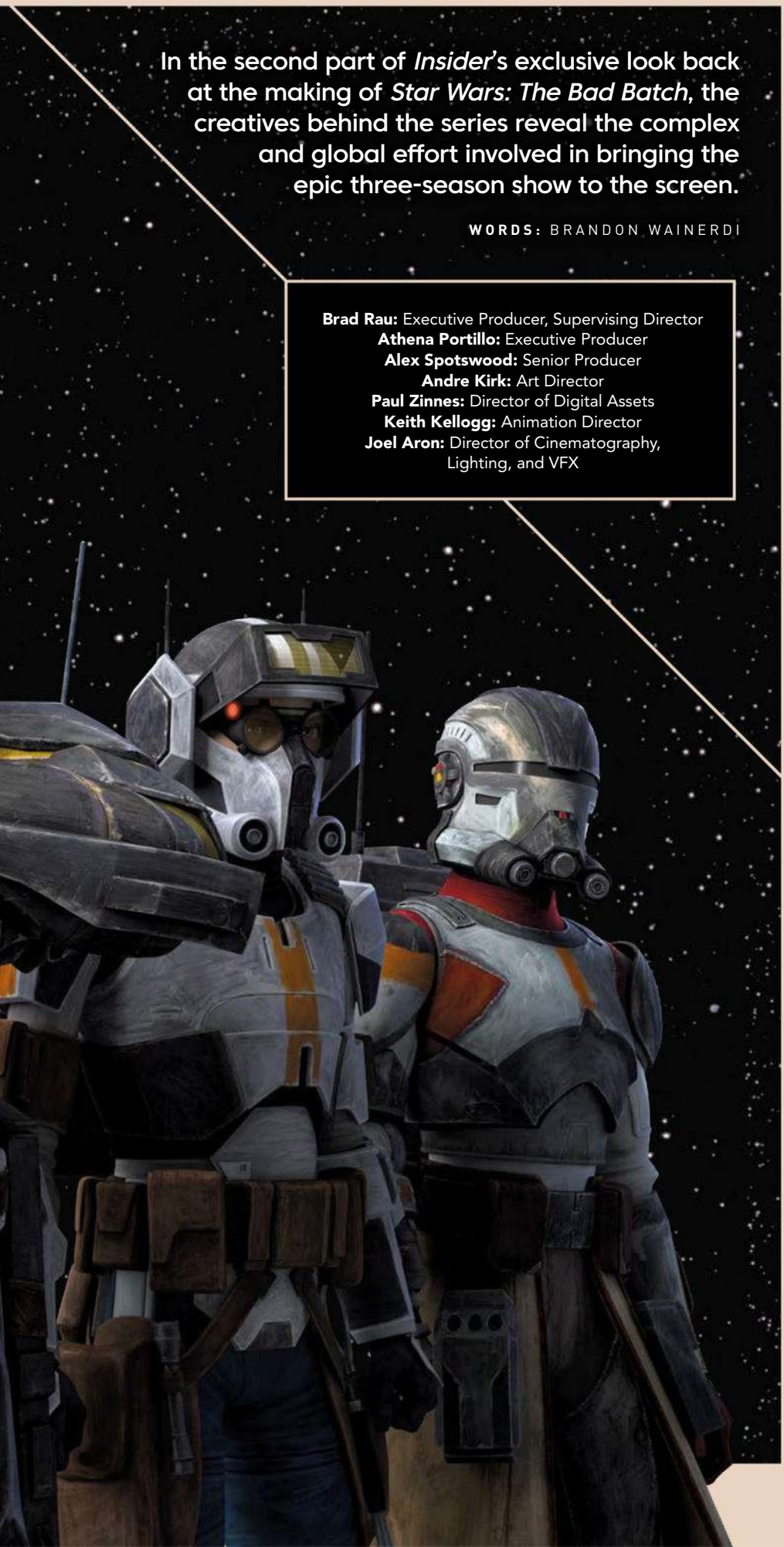
The Strategists



In the second part of *Insider*'s exclusive look back at the making of *Star Wars: The Bad Batch*, the creatives behind the series reveal the complex and global effort involved in bringing the epic three-season show to the screen.

WORDS: BRANDON WAINERDI

Brad Rau: Executive Producer, Supervising Director
Athena Portillo: Executive Producer
Alex Spotswood: Senior Producer
Andre Kirk: Art Director
Paul Zinnes: Director of Digital Assets
Keith Kellogg: Animation Director
Joel Aron: Director of Cinematography, Lighting, and VFX



It is a testament to the creative team working behind the scenes on *The Bad Batch* that it was easy for audiences to forget they were watching an animated series. The complexity of the show's visuals, the ambition in its storytelling, and its compelling characters made for a genuinely cinematic experience that has garnered both critical and fan approval.

Star Wars Insider spoke to the team at Lucasfilm Animation to discover just how complicated the show was to make, and how technology and processes have changed since they began making *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* in 2008.

***Star Wars Insider:* How does each team, from the executive level of management to the artistic execution of the visuals led by Lucasfilm Animation's leadership, begin to plan a series like *The Bad Batch*?**

Athena Portillo: As executive producer, I visualized the big picture within the production parameters of the show. Dave Filoni orchestrated the creative and narrative, while I functioned as a conductor in executing his vision within our schedule and budget. My role was to put in place what was necessary to achieve specific goals and to keep the production on track. That meant providing direction through each division, so that everyone was on the same page and in tune with what was required to meet deadlines and stay within budget. Once we were on the same wavelength, I could move into a macro-manager role, because I trusted my team to execute the work beautifully.

Alex Spotswood: At the start of each season, Athena [Portillo] and I would sit down and talk through things like where we thought episodes should air and when the scripts would be worked on. I would then block out the production schedule from scripting through to post-production.

01 Season One character concept art for Wrecker and Tech.

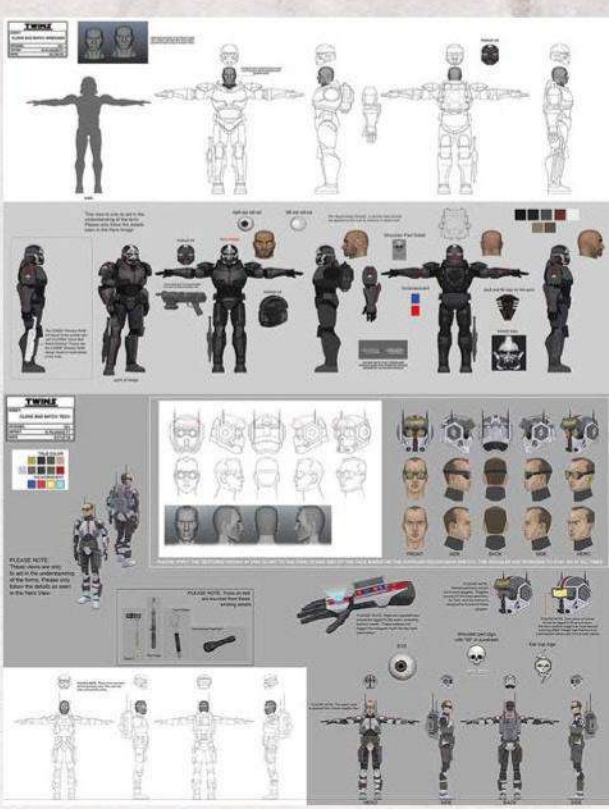
02 Mokko Town concept art by Clint Felker from the Season Two episode, "Retrieval."

03 Captured zillo beast lighting concept by Molly Denmark from the Season Two episode, "Metamorphosis."

That schedule was a bit like a waterfall, because we were producing multiple episodes at any one time, and every piece of the pipeline needed to flow together seamlessly. Each script needed to be finished on schedule so that our design department knew whether they had a new character or location to design. Those designs were needed by the asset department, who had to build them before animation and lighting could be done. Then there are retakes, followed by post, then musical scoring and color correction. It was my job to ensure all of that stayed on schedule.

Andre Kirk: When my team received each script, we would break them down into individual components so we could see how many new assets an episode needed, or whether existing ones could be reused or adapted. We worked very closely with Brad Rau, the supervising director, to pitch our ideas and coordinated with Paul Zinnes, our director of digital assets, to find out what we *could* build. It doesn't help if you design something that cannot actually be achieved. That's why those discussions amongst departments were very important to have early on.

01



02

Paul Zinnes: I stepped in pretty much right after the design stage. I would look at Andre's team's designs, and then prepare bids to make sure that we had enough time and resources allocated to build everything. To resolve any problems early on, I'd sit down with our supervising directors to go through each episode and figure out where we needed to make changes or retexture, in order to get an asset to fit within our budget and timeframe.

Joel Aron: The cinematography and VFX planning starts as soon as the script is locked and the story launch with the entire team takes place. It's at that time that I will work with Brad and the episodic director to understand the

"That schedule was a bit like a waterfall, because we were producing multiple episodes at any one time."
Alex Spotswood, Senior Producer

03

04

visual narrative that is the target for how the lighting and VFX will compliment the story. My team and I will then prepare all visual material to share with our partners at CGCG in Taiwan for every single shot as we have been since *The Clone Wars*. It's this precise collaboration with our CGCG lighting, VFX, and matte-painting teams over the years that allow us to create the stunning visuals that we have now on *The Bad Batch*.

Keith Kellogg: I, or one of my leads, would act out about a third of each episode for the CGCG team to give them a starting point as to what we wanted from the acting. For us, it was always about bringing out the emotion of a scene. We tried to give the animators a whole lot of information upfront. From there, we just kept refining and honing everything to where we wanted it to be.

Has evolving technology had an impact over the course of *The Bad Batch*'s three seasons?

AP: We have made some pretty big technical strides over the years, evolving *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* aesthetic to where it is now, but also changes in the pipeline. If you look at Season One of *The Clone Wars* now, and then you look at Season Seven, there was a massive jump. It's been incredible. It speaks to the fortitude, desire, and passion between our leads and our artists here at Lucasfilm Animation, and with our animation team at CGCG.

05

JA: With every episode there are story challenges that push the abilities of what we can do in the time we have. The biggest leap for the look of the show was how we embraced all of the new rendering and compositing tools that emulate real world optics that are now fast enough to use within our tight production window. Most important for me, is being able ▶

04 Clone Force 99 were introduced in Season Seven of *The Clone Wars*.

05 *The Clone Wars* Season Seven concept art by Jason Boesch.

06

06 Pabu concept art by Clint Felker.

to maintain our painterly style, and with every episode, challenge ourselves and the technology to create a beautiful cinematic experience.

PZ: Back then, we just had Adobe Photoshop. It's hard to rewatch those episodes, to the extent that it almost makes me want to redo them.

07

07 Season One episode "Cut and Run."

08 Ian McDiarmid reprised his role as Emperor Palpatine in Season Three.

09 Kashyyyk concept art by Molly Denmark, from the Season Two episode, "Tribe."

Now we have things like 3D paint programs, sculpting programs, and the ability to set dress with tremendous amounts of detail, with individual leaves, litter, and rocks. That's just something we couldn't dream of back when we first started.

KK: The technology also really allowed the look of our show to step up a notch. Armor doesn't "stretch" like it used to, which killed me for years. With our character-positioning we've striven to achieve more dynamic poses, to make it all feel more real.

PZ: We're able to have much more complex environments now, with so much more fidelity. We were barely allowed to mention the word

08

09

10

"grass" if we were building an outdoor set for *Star Wars Rebels*, but nowadays, grass is just not an issue anymore.

AK: The longer we work on these shows, the more we push ourselves, the more we feel that we can do more. And we want to do more. We continually try and improve what we can achieve, not just with each series, but with each episode. This mindset is all around Lucasfilm Animation—we are a bunch of people who are constantly trying to improve what we put on screen, because, at the end of the day, we're supporting the story. And we want our part in this story to be as good as the story itself.

Brad Rau: I think one of the advantages of animation is that there is an opportunity to experiment. How do we make things bigger and better? With our budgets and schedules and processes, we have been able to scale and scope the action even bigger than live action.

10 Hunter (voiced by Dee Bradley Baker) with Omega (voiced by Michelle Ang) aboard the *Marauder*.

11 Echo left the Batch in Season Two to fight alongside Rex.

12 In Season Three, Omega made good use of the skills she had picked up during her travels with the Batch.

13 Safa Toma race concept art for the Season Two episode, "Faster" by Molly Denmark.

13

"For us, it was always about bringing out the emotion of a scene."

Keith Kellogg, Animation Director

11

12

Looking back across the entire run of the show, what are the standout things that you're most proud of?

AK: We had the misfortune of working through the pandemic on this series, but just like *The Bad Batch*'s theme of finding your family and your place in the world, we dealt with a lot of the issues thrown up by that world-changing event as a team.

PZ: I am proud of those moments where we all came together to figure out how to achieve something that any one department could not have achieved on its own. If we were building a large environment, we'd work with design to figure out which parts of the design we actually needed to build, and which parts would be in the background, or what we didn't have to build at all because the story team told us they were

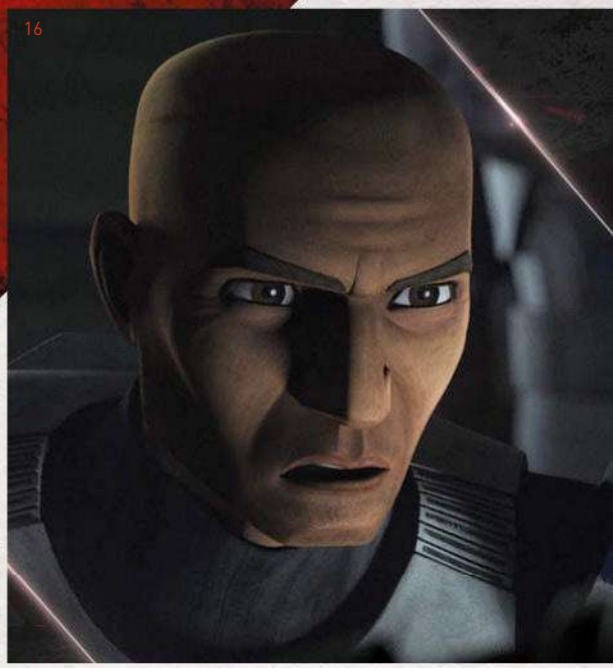
"We think not just in color, but in shape. Every shot should feel like a work of art."

Joel Aron, Director of Cinematography, Lighting, and VFX

14

15

16



14 Omega's first appearance in Season One of *The Bad Batch*.

15 Despite tragedy and loss, Omega retained her characteristic determination at the beginning of Season Three.

16 Rex commands a team of rogue clones in Season Three.

17 Asaj Ventress (voiced by Nikka Futterman).

18 Cad Bane (Voiced by Corey Burton).

just going to shoot in a specific area. When we got together to work through those things, that's when it was the most rewarding.

JA: It really is the people, and I think that goes all the way back to the original *Star Wars*. It's a George Lucas thing. He didn't want *tools*; he wanted *people* working things out. We were a very small team when *Rebels* was winding down, so we were able to bring on, for lack of a better term, apprentices who could learn to do what we do so they could take on shots themselves.

KK: That also goes for our team over at CGCG. We've worked with them for the last 15 years, and our partnership has definitely grown over that time. It's helped a lot to be able to really push them and to push ourselves in terms of the quality, as well as the different animation styles we've done with *Rebels*, *Star Wars Resistance*, and *Star Wars: Tales of the Jedi*. Every one of those shows has really helped shape all the different things we can do.

The animation and the lighting of the series wouldn't look out of place in a theatrical presentation. How did you achieve that?

JA: It always starts at the very beginning, when Dave [Filoni] reads a script in a story launch meeting. He might say something like, "This is like *The Fugitive* or *Yojimbo*," and the seeds of ideas begin to form in my mind.

I'd start by grabbing images and throwing them onto a reference board, and from there we would start talking about other references and

17

18

19

inspiration. For instance, some of the episodes in Season Three have the feel of 1930's Chicago, so immediately we thought of *A League of Their Own* and *The Natural.* I would go through the episode and find pivotal frames from movies or fine art that might work for a scene or shot, then I'd put together a lighting guide for everything. But we never thought that way for just a singular episode. We thought in terms of an arc, and for an entire season. For Season One, we mirrored light to darkness. The light gave a sense of discovery for Omega; while the darkness came when Omega was gone. Because Season Three of *The Bad Batch* is such a critical one, there are a lot of circular themes. We think not just in color, but in shape. Every shot should feel like a work of art.

Where do you foresee *Star Wars* animation going in the future?

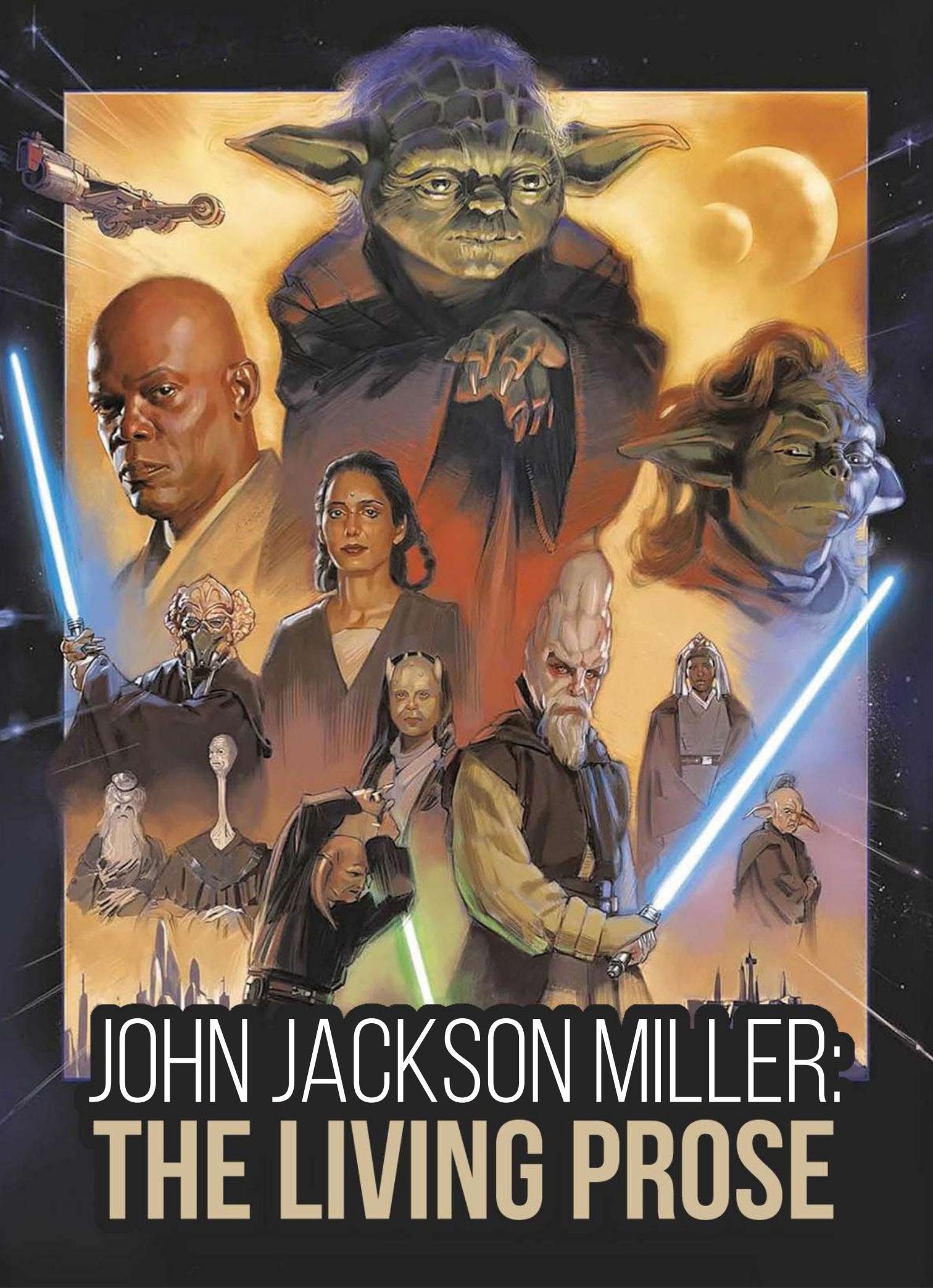
AS: I'm super excited about where we're going. *The Bad Batch* has done an amazing job of telling fantastic stories, but also giving us a platform to push ourselves as animators and in the quality of animation we're making. Everything we've learned in the past few years will allow us to go that much further with whatever we work on next. It's a very interesting time.

KK: We just want to keep telling great stories. Dave Filoni has taught us all that, whatever we do, there has to be a reason for each story. That goes along with everything we do, so we're just going to continue to keep pushing. I don't think you've seen the best of us yet.

AP: Since the inception of Lucasfilm Animation in 2005, we have had the honor of continuing to tell stories within the *Star Wars* galaxy. It began with a unique aesthetic created by George Lucas and Dave Filoni, and we have stayed true to that aesthetic while making huge technological advances. And we are continuing to develop new creative approaches not only to the visuals, but to the narrative as well.

BR: It all goes back to the characters. That's what we're looking at now. There are a variety of things we want to do, but it always starts with the characters. In this awesome world of *Star Wars*, stories can take shape in many ways.

19 *The Bad Batch* Season Three promotional poster.



JOHN JACKSON MILLER: THE LIVING PROSE

The germ of an idea for a *Star Wars* story in 1994 led to John Jackson Miller becoming a best-selling writer of comics and novels set in the galaxy far, far away. With his latest offering, *Star Wars: The Living Force*, arriving in bookstores this April, Miller spoke to *Insider* about his Jedi tales.

WORDS: MEG DOWELL

01

01 John Jackson Miller.

02 Miller wrote the long-running *Knights of the Old Republic* comic for *Dark Horse*. Art by Brian Ching

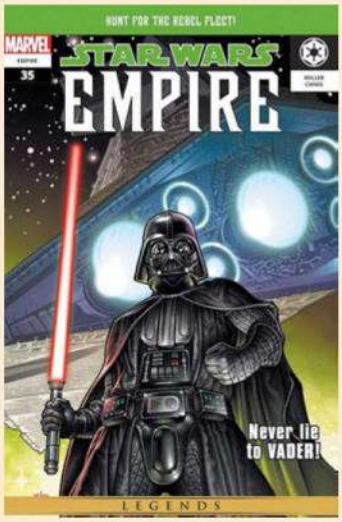
03 Miller's first *Star Wars* story was published in issue #35 of *Star Wars: Empire*.

02

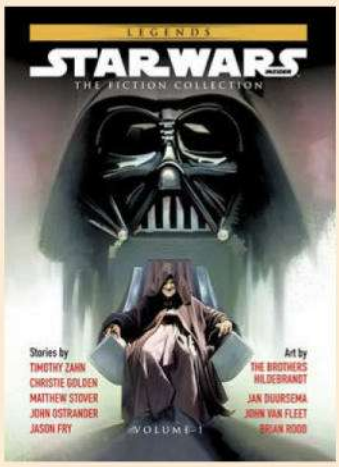
John Jackson Miller is among the most prolific *Star Wars* writers in publishing. His *Knights of the Old Republic* series for Dark Horse Comics ran for four years, spanning dozens of issues, and paved the way for his widely successful novels *Star Wars: Kenobi* and *Star Wars: A New Dawn*. His work has explored the complexities surrounding what it means to be a Jedi, a theme which takes center stage in Miller's latest *Star Wars* novel, *The Living Force*.

***Star Wars Insider*: It looks like 2024 will be a pretty big year for you. Not only does it mark the tenth anniversary of your novel *Star Wars: A New Dawn*, but your latest tale is about to be released. How did you get your start in *Star Wars* publishing?**

John Jackson Miller: It was back in 2004, when I was just starting out my career editing comics and wasn't sure how to progress, or if I was ready to. Around that time, Randy Stradley at Dark Horse Comics invited me to submit single-issue stories for *Star Wars Empire*. I'd had an idea for a *Star Wars* story back in 1994, that I even started writing; it became "Model Officer," which ▶



03



04

05

04 Miller has written short fiction for *Star Wars Insider*.

05 Darth Vader with Rae Sloane.

appeared in *Star Wars Empire* #35. That was my first *Star Wars* comic, published in 2005. Apparently, because that one tryout issue went well enough, they gave me a whole series, so the rest of that year was dominated with writing *Knights of the Old Republic*.

That ended up running for 57 issues and had various incarnations. There was the *Knight Errant* novel, and *The Lost Tribe of the Sith* collected stories and comics, which led to me being offered the opportunity to write the *Kenobi* novel in 2013.

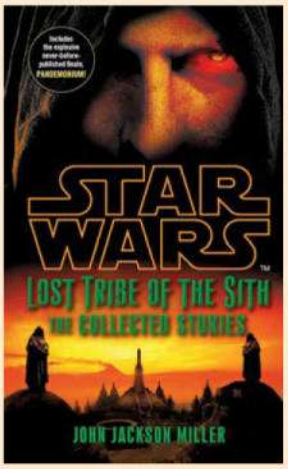
After *Kenobi* you wrote the first novel of the new era, *A New Dawn*. Was that experience any different to your previous *Star Wars* storytelling?

I first spoke with my editor at Random House about the *Star Wars Rebels* prequel novel, which became *A New Dawn*, while I was promoting *Kenobi* at New York Comic-Con in 2013.

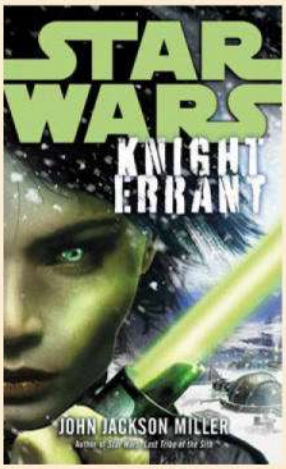
Rebels was not even close to coming out when I started working on the project, but the recently formed Lucasfilm Story Group had coalesced by that point, so there was an opportunity for consultation with the people who were involved in making the show, and they suggested possible story arcs that I could write about. I decided I wanted to write the story of how Kanan and Hera met, as I didn't think it would therefore collide with anything they were doing on the show.

I was two-thirds of the way through the novel when I learned that Lucasfilm intended it to mark the beginning of this new era of *Star Wars* licensed material where everything was going to be part of official lore. Myself and others were invited to the Presidio — it was partly my fault that Timothy Zahn got lost looking at the Yoda statue out front of Lucasfilm's headquarters — and it was at that meeting that I suggested the one character I thought could have a future beyond *A New Dawn* was Rae Sloane. She went on to appear in short stories in *Star Wars*

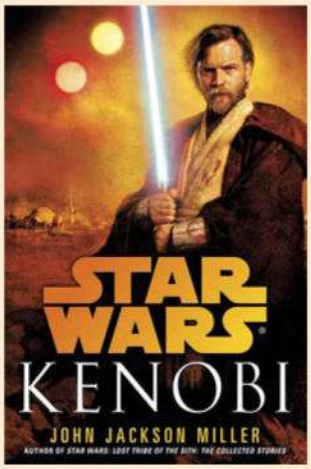
"ONE CHARACTER I THOUGHT COULD HAVE A FUTURE BEYOND *A NEW DAWN* WAS RAE SLOANE."



06



07



08

06 The print edition of Miller's ebook series *Lost Tribe of the Sith*.

07 *Knight Errant* was Miller's 2011 novel continuing an arc from the *Dark Horse* comic.

08 *Kenobi* cover art by Chris McGrath.

Insider, and again in the *Aftermath* novels. Then she appeared in the *Kanan* comic, and later in *Star Wars: Squadrons*.

In 2014, the challenge was simply that we were going to have these big things entering the *Star Wars* galaxy and we had to clear the flight path for them. Now here we are, ten years on, and we know a lot better what we were only learning how to do back then.

You've had the opportunity to write for existing *Star Wars* characters and to introduce your own to the broader storytelling. What has that been like?

There are different dynamics between writing characters who you've created and mimicking those who already exist on screen. When I'm writing for the movie characters, I'm looking to match the experiences that other people have had with a character. But that is a different thing from writing somebody that I've created. In just about everything that I've written for *Star Wars* — every novel, every comic series — there have been two or three characters where I could happily write another whole book about just that person.

In the case of Kanan Jarrus and Hera Syndulla, the screen versions were still in development, so I hadn't got to know them when I was writing *A New Dawn*. I really had to rely on the help that Dave Filoni and the Story Group gave me, and the materials they provided, like animation sequences for me to look at. Vanessa Marshall, who portrayed Hera, told me later she really liked the way I captured her voice.

Let's talk about *The Living Force*. And this time it's not just about a specific Jedi, but the entire Jedi Council.

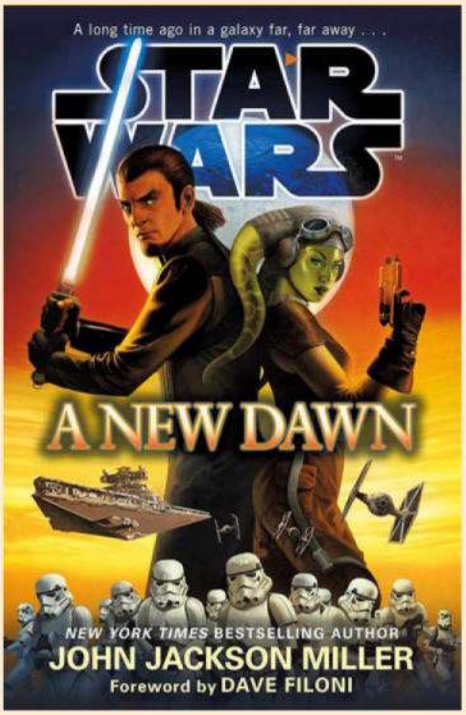
What I've found in all the comics, short stories, and the novels I've written, is that good things do not always happen when Jedi get together. *Knights of the Old Republic* was a really extreme example of the disconnect between caring for the one and then caring for everything, caring for the now and then caring for the future. At the time I was writing that series for *Dark Horse*, *Revenge of the Sith* came out, showing the ultimate failure of the Jedi and the Jedi Council to see a danger that was right in front of them. And that kicked off a number of story ideas where I had Jedi who were detached from the Jedi Order, who were either failed by it, or were just unable to connect with it and were having to make decisions on their own. Those were threads that were in all my *Star Wars* stories, and that really came about because the prototypical Jedi happened to be a lone Jedi in *Star Wars* stories until we had *The Phantom Menace*.

Terry Brooks, who wrote the novelization of *The Phantom Menace*, was the first to elaborate on the difference between the living Force and

09 *Star Wars: A New Dawn*. Cover art by Doug Wheatley

10 The novel revealed how Kanan Jarrus and Hera Syndulla first met.

09


A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away . . . .
STAR WARS
A NEW DAWN
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
JOHN JACKSON MILLER
Foreword by DAVE FILONI

10

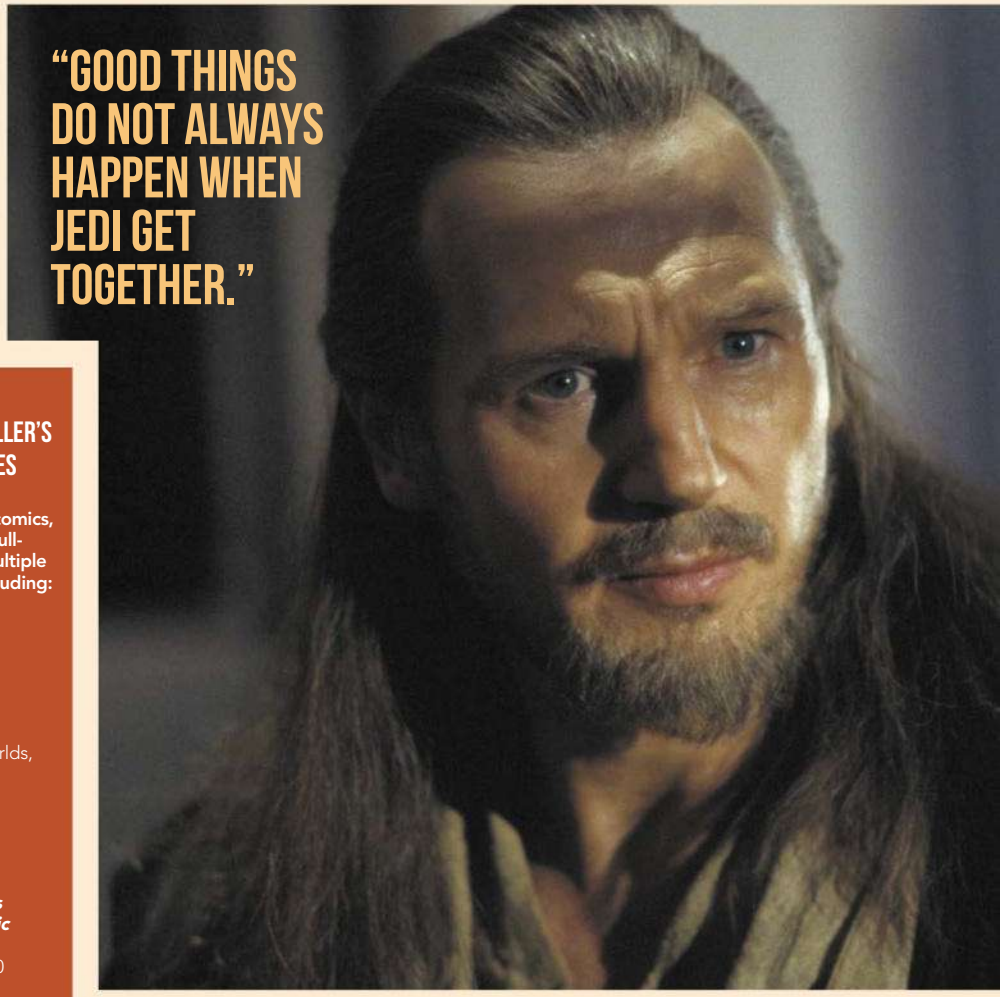
the unifying Force (now known as the cosmic Force), which translates as "the here and now" versus "the big picture." I was like, "Yeah, okay, I get this." *The Living Force* has given me the opportunity to address that, and look at something else which has always interested me about *Star Wars*: The Jedi are bound to protect people and preserve peace and justice in the galaxy — but there's doing that in your daily life, and then there's doing that long-term. Qui-Gon Jinn had a line right at the beginning of *The Phantom Menace* where he tells Obi-Wan Kenobi to be mindful of the living Force. What he was teaching his apprentice was that Kenobi needed to pay more attention to who and what was happening around him. It suggested that Qui-Gon was much more involved with the people that he met along the way than other Jedi of the period were.

So, when I was approached by Random House Worlds' Tom Hoeler, and he asked if I would be interested in writing a novel about the Council, I said, "I'll tell you what — I'll do it if I can have Qui-Gon challenge the Jedi to do better, to leave their ivory tower and try to remember what it was actually like going out into the galaxy."

That is a lot of Jedi to weave into one narrative.

I got to engage with all twelve of them, and I really chased down what they thought was important about being a Jedi, what they thought their job could be, and also how they felt about how things were going, given the story is one year out from the events of *The Phantom Menace*. This was a period of time where the Jedi were confronted with signs of decline, and a sense that they were not meeting their own high standards. But at the same time I wanted to show the environment that they were in, and how they were affecting other people, what other people thought of the Jedi and their role. I think that speaks to the central question of what the Jedi should be doing.

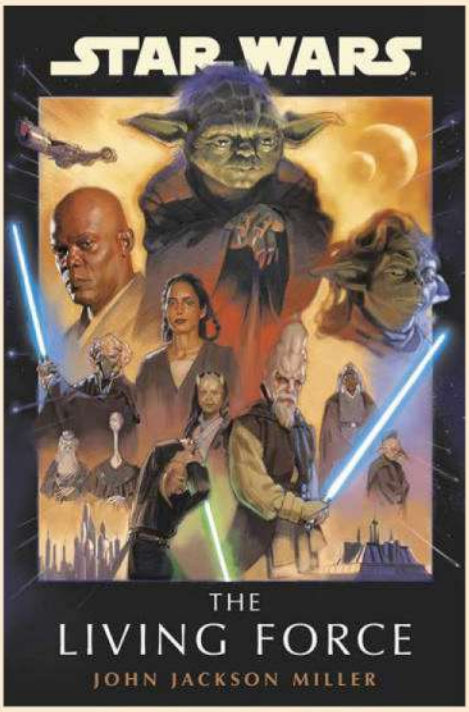
11



11 Qui-Gon Jinn challenges the Jedi Council in *The Living Force*.

12 The cover for John Jackson Miller's new *Star Wars* novel.

12



JOHN JACKSON MILLER'S *STAR WARS* STORIES

Miller has written comics, short stories, and full-length novels in multiple *Star Wars* eras, including:

Star Wars: A New Dawn
Del Rey, 2014

Star Wars: The Living Force
Random House Worlds, 2024

LEGENDS
Star Wars: Kenobi
Del Rey, 2013

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic
Dark Horse Comics
52 issues, 2006-2010

Star Wars: Knight Errant
Del Rey, 2011
Dark Horse Comics
15 issues, 2010-2012

Star Wars: Lost Tribe of the Sith
Del Rey
9 ebooks, 2009-2012

DISCOVER THE WARRIORS OF MANDALORE... AND BEYOND!

THE MANDALORIAN CHARACTERS OF THE *STAR WARS* GALAXY EXPLORED IN ONE DELUXE HARDCOVER VOLUME!

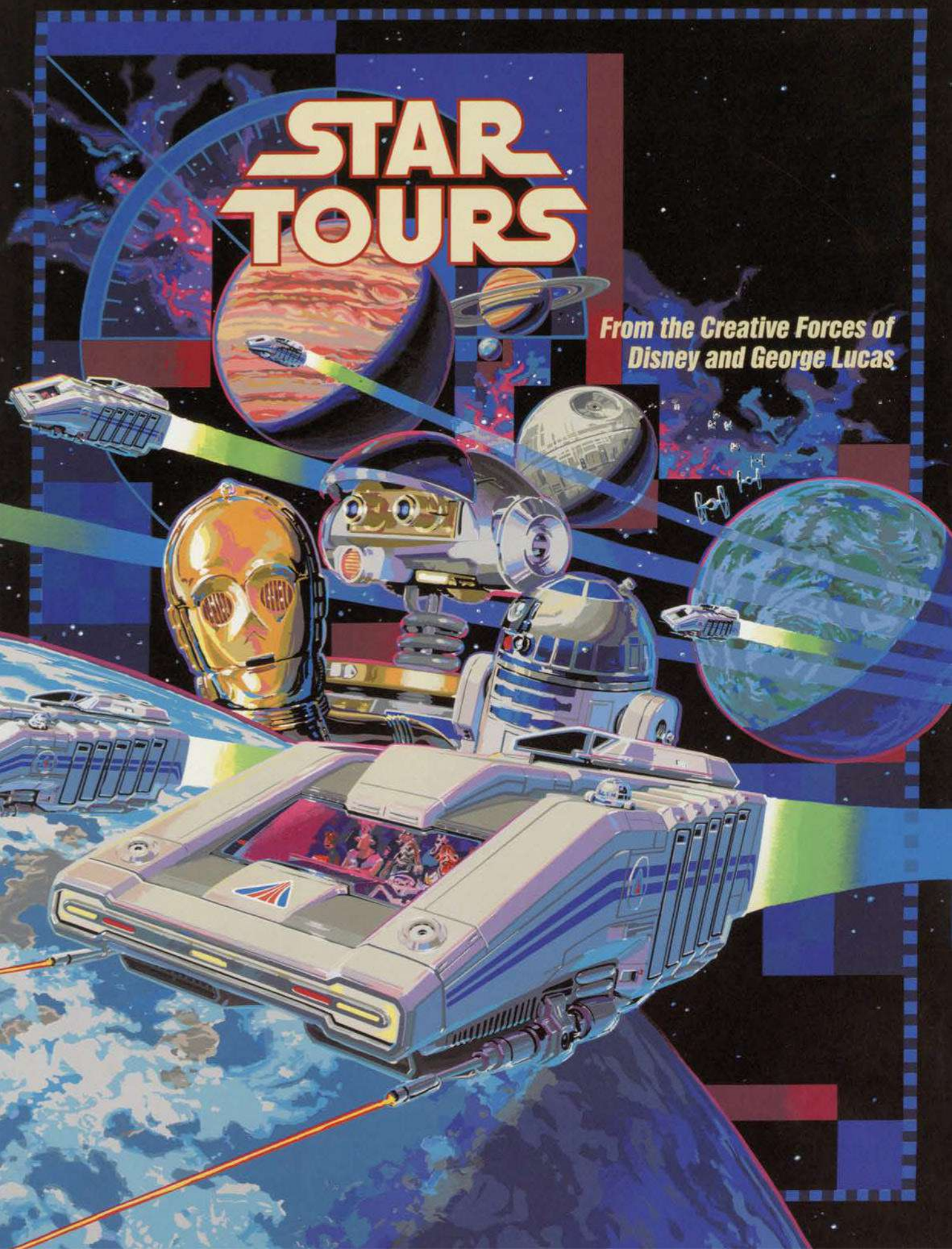
Includes interviews with Pedro Pascal (Din Djarin), Temuera Morrison (Jango and Boba Fett), Katee Sackhoff (Bo-Katan Kryze), and lavishly illustrated with concept art, photography, and more!

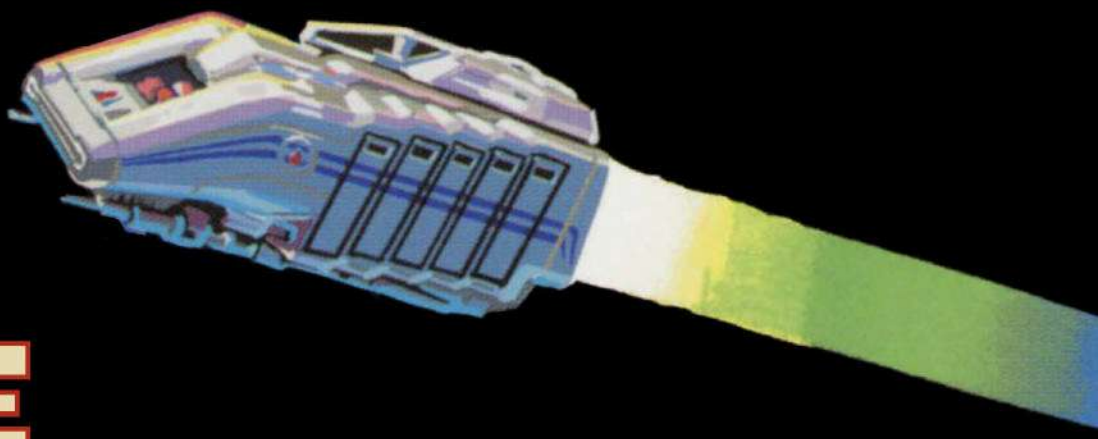
AVAILABLE IN ALL GOOD STORES AND ONLINE

TITAN-COMICS.COM

© & TM 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd.

The Ultimate STAR WARS Adventure!





THE ADVENTURES CONTINUE

Welcome aboard *Star Tours*! To mark the popular Disney Parks attraction's 2024 update, *Insider* talks to award-winning artists from Industrial Light & Magic and Skywalker Sound about their 30-plus year collaboration with Walt Disney Imagineering.

WORDS: LUCAS O. SEASTROM

Disney Parks allow everyday guests to step out of their ordinary lives and into cinematic adventures. When Disneyland opened in 1955, they could choose from stories inspired by movies as diverse as Westerns, animated fairy tales, science fiction, and exotic travelogues. Over the years, living out cinematic dreams continued to fuel Disneyland's changes and enhancements. In 1977, Lucasfilm released *Star Wars: A New Hope*, and although the film wasn't Disney's, the company's Imagineers, responsible for theme park design, pondered an attraction based on the space fantasy.

By 1984, Lucasfilm and Disney had formally agreed to create attractions for both *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* in the Disney Parks. The Imagineers had already been working on concepts that adapted the galaxy far, far away, and one ▸

of the attraction ideas they envisioned featured an emerging technology still little-used in Theme parks.

For many years, Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI) had explored the possibilities of motion-based flight simulators for its attractions. Used by pilots in training, they utilized an enclosed space atop a movable platform. Inside, moving images could be synchronized with the platform to evoke the sensation of flight. The system seemed a perfect fit for *Star Wars*. To realize the visuals that passengers would glimpse outside the 'window' of their spacecraft, WDI would first partner with Lucasfilm's visual effects division, Industrial Light & Magic.

01 Concept art for the original *Star Tours* attraction.

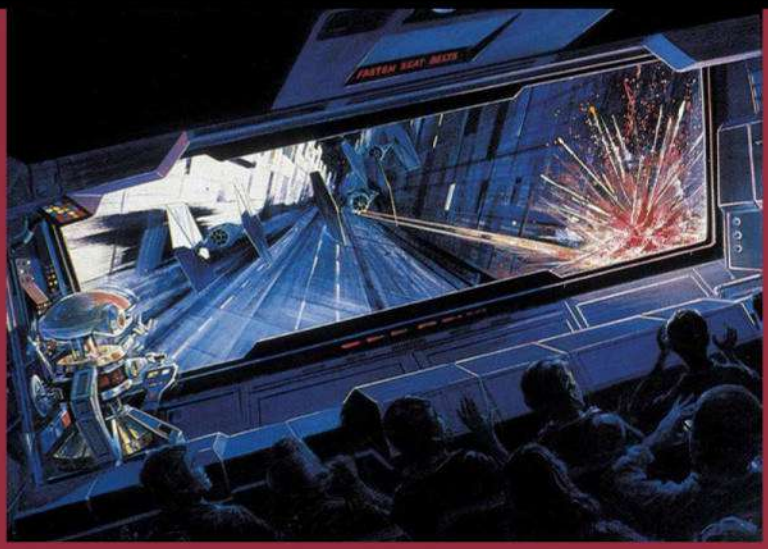
Preparing the Flight Plan

It was fitting that the artists who helped create the original *Star Wars* trilogy would help create the scenes to be traversed by guests aboard *Star Tours*. Visual effects supervisor Dennis Muren was chief among them. "I grew up in L.A., and I'd go down to Disneyland," he says. "It was a great fantasy place. I loved what was originally there, and then it became this growing thing. It was disconcerting at first. I thought, 'Is this possible,

02 Model maker Ira Keeler (left) and visual effects art director Dave Carson apply final touches to the miniature launch bay.

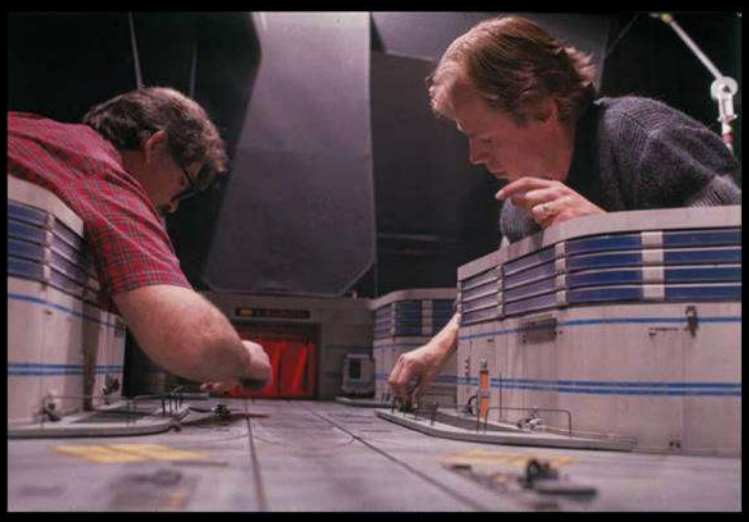
03 Storyboards by Dave Carson depict the tour's accidental involvement in the Death Star trench run.

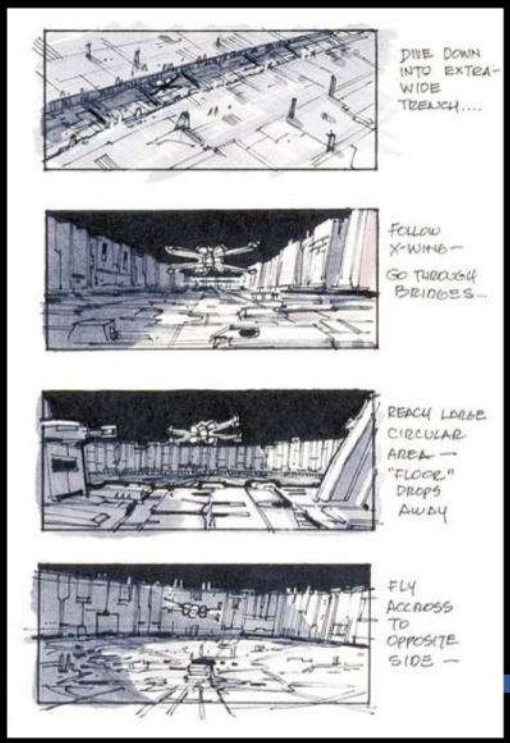
01



"You go behind the scenes during what is supposed to be a routine flight and you end up in a dogfight in the *Star Wars* galaxy."
Dave Carson, Visual Effects Art Director

02




DIVE DOWN INTO EXTRA-WIDE TRENCH....
FOLLOW X-WING— GO THROUGH BRIDGES...
REACH LARGE CIRCULAR AREA— "FLOOR" DROPS AWAY
FLY ACCROSS TO OPPOSITE SIDE —

that Walt Disney could change it whenever he wants?' But each of the places that he added really brought a lot to it. I liked the idea of it changing."

Muren was joined by ILM art director Dave Carson, himself another Disneyland fan since childhood. "Tony Baxter and Tom Fitzgerald were the two key Imagineers, and they sat down and wrote a story for the ride," Carson recalls. "It was very long. The ride had to be five minutes max, so George Lucas came in with another idea. He was curious about what happened on a Disneyland ride behind the doors on the tracks where the cars go for maintenance, and thought it would be fun if you could go into that kind of space. Tom and Tony wrote something much shorter with a rookie pilot, Captain Rex, who took the ship in

03

the wrong direction by accident. You go behind the scenes during what is supposed to be a routine flight and you end up in a dogfight in the *Star Wars* galaxy."

For the ILM crew, *Star Tours* was both familiar and different. Because the simulator presents a first-person view out its 'window,' the visual effects needed to appear as one continuous shot, something that "affects my feeling of what those spaces were like," as Muren explains. "Usually in movies, it was chop, chop, chop, close-up, wide shot. Now we could show a setting dimensionally. We could have one experience, but what was it going to be like in five seconds? If we were heading down the Death Star trench and saw something in the distance, we weren't going to cut away to Luke but go right by that thing, so what was the camera maneuver going to be? It felt more like being in a real place rather than making shots for a movie."

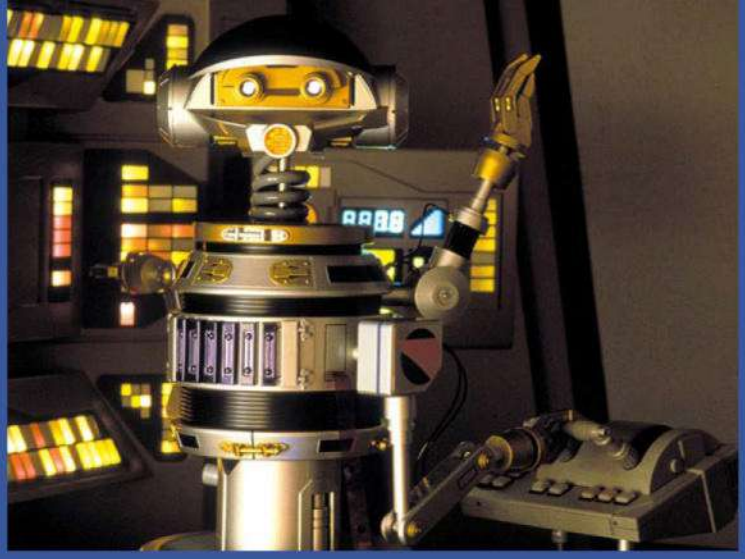
04 Captain Rex, the original Starspeeder 3000 pilot.

05 A preliminary storyboard by Dave Carson for the "simulator attraction."

06 Camera operator Selwyn Eddy readies the motion-control camera on the maintenance bay set.

07 Visual effects supervisor Dennis Muren prepares a shot in the launch bay.

04

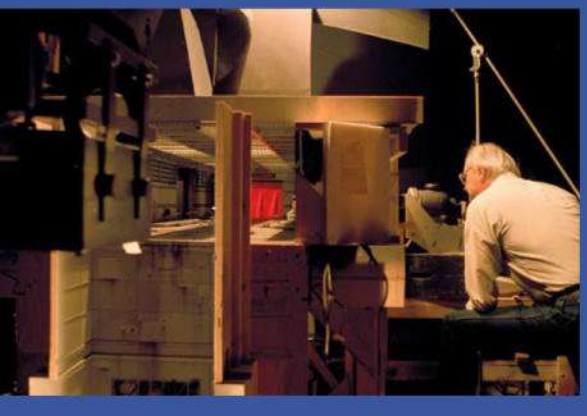


05

"SAY HELLO TO THE FOLKS R-2"
THE PARTITION HAS BEEN RAISED AND WE SEE A STATIC VIEW OF THE LOADING ROOM...
R-2 IS LOWERED INTO THE NAVIGATION POST.
SIMULATOR ATTRACTION - PRELIMINARY STORYBOARDS

06

07



As Carson made storyboards, he had to depict not one but three different views: the main viewport, Captain Rex to the left, and a video monitor to the right. "I had to start thinking about how to make all of these events happen without cuts," he says. "The only thing you could do was turn. A turn became the cut. You do something for a while, and the ship takes a hard turn and then, 'Oh look, there's the Death Star!'"

Of course, it would've been impossible to actually film the miniature sets and effects elements in one long take, so the ILM crew also had to devise ways of hiding cuts, typically using laser flashes, impacts, and starfield dissolves. Relatively long takes were shot for 10, 20, even 30 seconds, and the miniatures were often made at a smaller scale to allow the starspeeder to cover more distance.

"We wanted it to resonate with feeling at each moment," explains Muren. "We had to make sure that any cheats were invisible to the guests, or the entire experience could ring false. We wanted to fly over the Death Star surface as much as we could, which was so fun in the *Star Wars* movies. The emotions had to be as intense and familiar as in *Star Wars*. We embellished whatever we could but not to the point where it became silly, hopefully, or where it looked fake, but to the point where you'd only be thinking, 'Jeez! I almost died!'"

Into The Cave

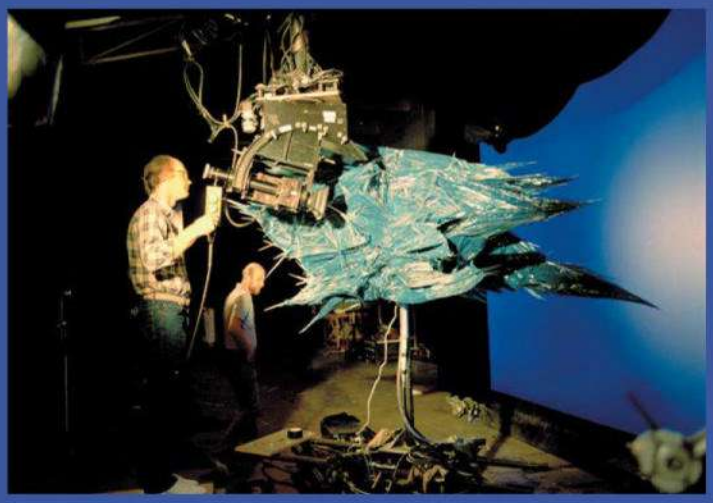
On the same Lucasfilm campus as ILM at the time was Sprocket Systems (known today as Skywalker Sound), where sound designers, editors, and mixers Gary Summers and Gary Rydstrom took on the *Star Tours* project, along with their fellow editor Laurel Ladevich. The crew worked in a studio known as 'Ben's Cave,' where original *Star Wars* sound designer Ben Burtt had worked on *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. The smaller room was perfect as the crew prepared sounds to be heard inside the starspeeder cabin. "We took the speakers from WDI and we put them around the

room in the same configuration as the simulator," notes Summers. "There was no point mixing it on a big movie system and then putting it into these little speakers. They had weight considerations for the simulator. We needed to hear it in the same conditions."

Summers was a veteran of both *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes* Back and *Jedi*, so he knew the ins and outs of the existing sound library. For Rydstrom, however, the Disneyland attraction was his first entry into the *Star Wars* galaxy. He recalls that, "The technology still amazes me. The ride was a seventy-millimeter print running through a projector that was latched to the back of this moving simulator and projected onto a little angled screen at the front of the cabin. We would bring people from ILM or Imagineering or George into Ben's Cave, and I swear that although nothing would move, it felt like we were moving. With the screen there showing ILM's stuff and our sound, it felt like the ride."

When *Star Tours* finally opened in January of 1987, it drew huge crowds (the park stayed open for 60 hours upon the initial debut). "People just kept coming and coming to *Star Tours*," notes Carson. "It was the boost that Disneyland really

08



09

08 Camera operator Scott Farrar (left) prepares to shoot a miniature "icesteroid."

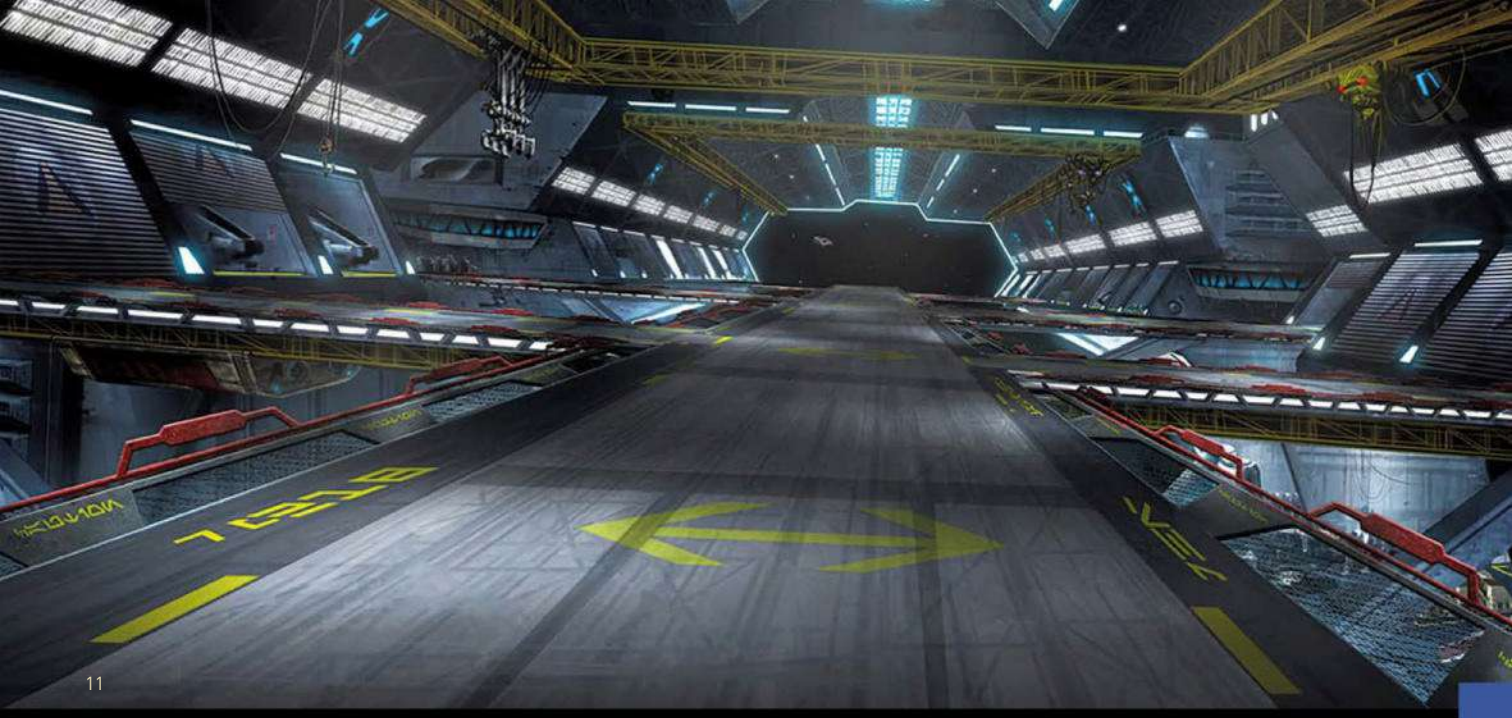
09 Model maker Steve Gawley airbrushes the maintenance bay door miniature.

10 C-3PO (voiced by Anthony Daniels) and R2-D2 welcome travelers to the spaceport.

10

"We would bring people from ILM or Imagineering or George into Ben's Cave, and I swear that although nothing would move, it *felt* like we were moving."

Gary Rydstrom, Sound Designer



11

12

11 The *Star Tours* main hangar was given an overhaul for the 2011 update.

12 For the 2011 update, effects elements for the Wookiees in flight over Kashyyyk were captured at ILM's former studio in San Rafael, California.

13 George Lucas and friends at the launch of *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue* at Walt Disney World in 2011.

13

needed." Muren adds that, "It was such a technical achievement, both on our part and Imagineering's part, to put those two systems together into something that would work."

During the coming years, there would be many more collaborations between WDI, ILM, and Skywalker Sound on Disney Parks attractions. *Star Tours*, meanwhile, would expand to other locations, including Walt Disney World, Tokyo Disneyland, and Disneyland Paris. Although plans to add new galactic scenes and variations to *Star Tours* had been discussed from the beginning, work didn't get underway until 2008, after completion of the prequel trilogy.

New Destinations

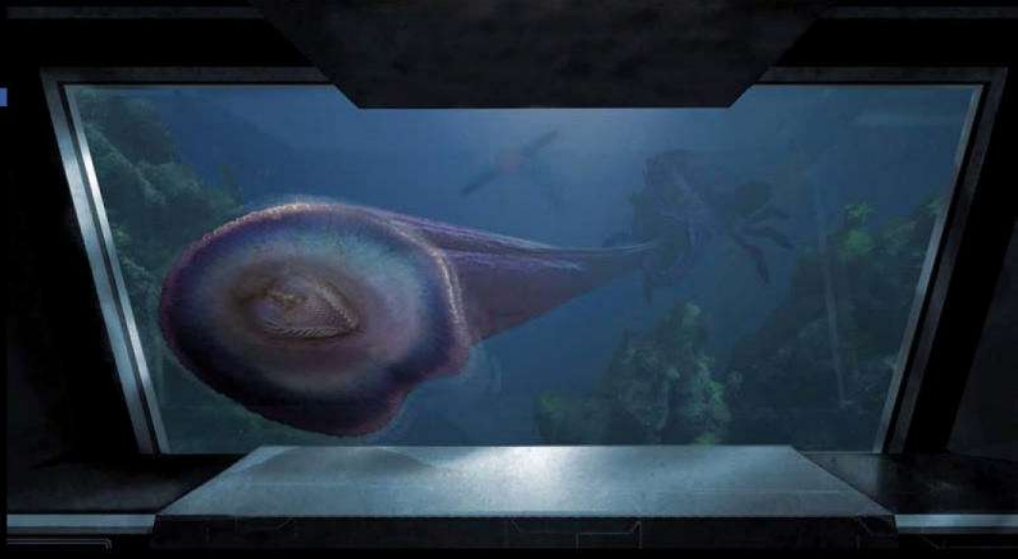
Digital technology would enhance the *Star Tours* experience in myriad ways. Original Imagineer Tom Fitzgerald remained on the WDI side as visual effects supervisor Bill George took charge at ILM. "It was almost a three-year project. We were starting over, and it was so advanced with how much had to be created, written, and storyboarded," recalls George, who recently retired from ILM after 43 years.

"So much of the experience was driven by Tom Fitzgerald and the team at WDI," George continues. "They came up with the branching storylines. Tom wanted each module to be special ▶

in its own way. We would meet with George Lucas about once a month, and he had so much fun with it. That was the closest I'd ever worked with George, and he came up with a huge number of ideas. It was amazing. He'd say, 'Oh you should do this,' and we were like, 'Why didn't we think of that?!' [*laughs*] His ideas were so clear and strong. No one tells a story like that guy. He was always thinking about the experience from the audience's perspective."

Along with a bevy of new planets to explore, the renamed *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue* would also be presented in 3D. The format was rapidly overtaking mainstream movies at the time, and it presented a new challenge for ILM. "As people's eyes change as they get older, there's a bit of a bell curve," says compositing supervisor Jon Alexander (who, along with Tom Fitzgerald, is likely the only person to work on every version of *Star Tours* to date). "Some people can't see it very much at all because they have a dominant eye. Other people are very sensitive to it, especially little kids. With *Star Tours*, sometimes things appear to come into the cabin, and George Lucas wanted to use the effect to accent moments—Darth Vader's hand coming reaching in, for example, or when the security droid scan feels like it is right in front of you, the glass shatters and it flies past you in the cabin."

Over at Skywalker Sound, sound designer Tom Meyers joined the *Star Tours* crew, having worked on many other Disney Parks attractions with Gary Rydstrom. "Designing the new Starspeeder 1000 sounds was probably the biggest new element of the first update, including all of its banks and moves," Meyers says. "There were other things too, such as when the giant fish grabs the speeder and its tongue hits the viewscreen. For each update, there have been moments when the world interacts with guests, so that's another area that required



14

15

16

17

14 Concept art of an opee sea killer attacking the Starspeeder 1000.

15 Compositing supervisor Jon Alexander at work on the 2011 update.

16 Rebels welcome the Starspeeder 1000 aboard *Home One*.

17 Visual effects supervisor Bill George (below, left) directing live-action shots.

"Designing the new Starspeeder 1000 sounds was probably the biggest new element of the first update."
Tom Meyers, Sound Designer

18

18 Boba Fett's Firespray attack craft during an encounter above Geonosis.

19 An encounter with an AT-AT on Hoth.

19

THE TIMELESS TOUR

Just a couple of years ago at *Star Wars* Celebration Anaheim, Dennis Muren and Bill George joined a panel of Imagineers celebrating 35 years of *Star Tours*. For Muren, it was an especially poignant moment to reflect on the legacy of the original version. "That was a really nice experience," he says. "There were about a thousand people there, and they loved this thing. It was pretty neat to have worked on something that long ago and have people still appreciate it. I appreciate them."

20

a new design element.

"When you're working on it, you get really detailed and have to refine things," Meyers continues, "Like that fourth laser sound needs to be moved over here, and so on. Then you ride it with an audience, and everyone's just having a blast, screaming and yelling. But wait, you didn't hear that fourth laser over there that we raised! [*laughs*] It's really fun to ride *Star Tours* with other people and see them react."

Expanding The Galaxy

Star Tours: The Adventures Continue first arrived at Disneyland and Walt Disney World in 2011. Six new planets combined with an array of holographic transmissions and bookend sequences, resulting in more than 250 possible ride combinations. As Lucasfilm joined the Walt Disney Company and began creating new stories in film and television, there was only more reason to continue making additions to *Star Tours*. Jakku, Crait, Batuu, and Exegol joined the itinerary, as did transmissions from new characters like Rey and Poe Dameron. The 2024 update is no exception, with the attraction sending guests transmissions from the Mandalorian and Grogu, Ahsoka Tano, and Cassian Andor, as well as visit to Peridia from the Disney+ series *Star Wars: Ahsoka*.

20 The Starspeeder 1000 even gets caught up in a podrace.

"Tom has always looked for

21

"When you see it on the screen inside the simulator, you buy that you're flipping all the way over. It's a real feature of this newest story."

Bill George, Visual Effects Supervisor

21 Din Djarin and Grogu join the roster of special-guest characters.

22 Ahsoka Tano (Rosario Dawson) leads the Starspeeder 1000 to Seatos.

23 Cassian Andor (Diego Luna) sends an urgent message in the latest *Star Tours* update.

what is going to be the most fun," says George. "At the foundation, we start from a point of realism, but other times we say, 'Let's break the rules and just do this because it would be fun.' So, we always went in with that philosophy, and it could be challenging because we want every module to be unique and strong, and the more you do, the harder it gets.

"In the one we just finished, which is associated with the *Ahsoka* series, we were able to do a corkscrew, or a Barrel roll," George continues. "It happens right at the end as a victory roll, and that's something we've never been able to do before. What I love about Tom is that although some people were saying it was impossible, he insisted 'We're going to do it!' When you see it on the screen inside the simulator, you buy that you're flipping all the way over. It's a real feature of this newest story."

Wherever the *Star Tours* fleet plans to make another hyperspace jump, you can be certain that the ILM and Skywalker Sound crews will be joining the Imagineers on the journey. Some of Lucasfilm's most highly skilled artists and technicians have contributed to the attraction over the years. It remains a unique portal through which to explore the galaxy far, far away.

22

23

STAR WARS INSIDER
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

WHEREVER YOU ARE...

STAR TOURS: THE CONTINUING ADVENTURES!
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE | ISSUE 225
STAR WARS INSIDER
Exclusive
An All-New The High Republic story!
Fiction!
Phantastic!
Celebrating 25 years of The Phantom Menace
The Bad Batch
Part Two of our exclusive look behind the scenes
Intergalactic Odyssey
Ahsoka Season One Companion
"WHAT HAVE WE HERE?"
BILLY DEE WILLIAMS ON PLAYING LANDO CA
INTERVIEW:
John Jackson Miller
Writing Star Wars: The Living Force
"WHAT HAVE WE HERE?"
BILLY DEE WILLIAMS ON PLAYING LANDO CALRISSIAN

www.pktmags.com/swi225

Whatever your device there's an edition for you.
Search '*Star Wars Insider*' on these platforms

Download on the App Store · nook · amazonkindle · zinio · pocketmags.com

© & TM 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd.

HAL HICKEL

"WELL, WATTO YA' KNOW?"

As *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* reaches the 25th anniversary of its original theatrical release, *Insider* spoke to Industrial Light & Magic animation supervisor Hal Hickel about his part in the making of the movie.

WORDS: BRANDON WAINERDI

Hal Hickel has been at Industrial Light & Magic for decades, beginning his career at the company with *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), and going on to work on films including *Super 8* (2011) and *Pacific Rim* (2013), as well as his Oscar-nominated contribution to 2017's *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. Now an Academy-Award-winning visual effects artist for his work on *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (2006), he returned to the galaxy far, far away, as animation aupervisor on *Star Wars: The Mandalorian* and *Star Wars: The Book of Boba Fett*.

Star Wars Insider caught up with the visual-effects legend to talk through the innovative practices of one of his very first movies, *The Phantom Menace* (1999), and how it is still impacting *Star Wars* and moviemaking 25 years later.

01 Toydarian junk trader Watto, voiced by Andy Secombe.

Star Wars Insider: Your career began with stop-motion animation at a time when the computer-generated revolution was brewing. How did you make the transition between them?

Hal Hickel: I had been doing some motion-graphics work in the pre-digital era, but I'd moved over to Will Vinton Studios to get back to my stop-motion roots. Stop-motion was what had initially interested me in visual effects, especially the original *King Kong* (1933) that I'd seen on TV when I was growing up. My plan was to work at Vinton and build up a reel that I could take down to Industrial Light & Magic or Tippett Studios (run by ILM legend, Phil Tippett), so I could work on movies like *Willow* (1988), or *RoboCop* (1987), or any projects that used significant stop-motion.

At Vinton, we were doing clay animation in a cartoony style, generally for commercials and some half-hour specials for ABC with the California Raisins. But when *Jurassic Park* came out in 1993, my hopes were crushed because I could see that stop-motion was on the way out. And I didn't know anything about computer animation. I'd been an observer of the rise of computer-generated effects throughout the 1980s, with *TRON* (1982), *The Last Starfighter* (1984), and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), and I thought it was all so fascinating, but I didn't know how to do it.

02

But then I got a super lucky break. Pixar needed extra animators because they were behind schedule on *Toy Story* (1995) and they had already sponged up all the talent that they could get in the San Francisco Bay Area. At the time, most of the people working at Pixar were traditional animators who had been pulled in for their animation skills and then taught how to use software, so I sent in my reel. That reel that would never get me hired there today, but they were really desperate, so I was hired and moved to the Bay Area on New Year's Day, 1995. I worked on *Toy Story* for the last few months of production, and it was such a great experience. I learned a ton, and it was such a wonderful, exciting time to be at Pixar.

"WHEN *JURASSIC PARK* CAME OUT IN 1993, MY HOPES WERE CRUSHED BECAUSE I COULD SEE THAT STOP-MOTION WAS ON THE WAY OUT."

When did you make the jump from Pixar to Industrial Light & Magic?

I knew that a second *Jurassic Park* was in the works, and that George Lucas was talking publicly about making more *Star Wars* movies. I thought, "Alright, I have CG shots from a high-profile project on my reel now, and I'm just across the bay from ILM. Now is the time." So, I sent a tape over and was hired as an animator, starting at the end of July 1996. My first project there was *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997), which ended up having a lot of similarities to *The Phantom Menace*, especially with some of the early creature-stampede shots on Naboo.

03

02 Hickel was tasked with working out how the droidekas would walk.

03 Stampeding creatures in *The Phantom Menace*.

What was the initial process for conceptualizing the animation for _The Phantom Menace_?

Very early on, the animation team went on a little field trip up to Skywalker Ranch, where the art department and previs (previsualization) were based. It was the nerve center for design

04

work on the film before shooting had even begun. They took us on a tour to show us all the incredible maquettes, storyboards, and artwork that had been created to that point.

It was really exciting for us, because there had been a very tight rein on information on the film, as you'd expect. The scripts weren't just lying around. If you wanted to read the script, you had to first get approval, and then you had to go sit in a room, read it there, and then give it back. That field trip filled our heads with all the amazing possibilities of the show.

04 Hal Hickel during the filming of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016).

05 Podracing pilot Ben Quadinaros.

05

Rob Coleman was the animation director on *The Phantom Menace*. What was it like working with him?

As animators, we would discuss everything with Rob. I found him to be someone who really gave his animators a lot of space. Any good habits I have as an animation supervisor I learned from Rob. I'm of the same mind. I like to give animators the space they need because the more ownership they have over things, the more invested they are, and the better the work. By the time creatures were rigged and ready to go, Rob—who ended up being animation director across all three prequel films—had generally soaked up enough information from George to guide us.

There was the script, of course, but it really didn't contain every detail. It didn't tell you who Ben Quadinaros was, as an example. So, when we got to the podrace, we could be sitting there and Rob would ask George, "Well, who's this guy? What's his story?" George always had a quick answer for these things because he had genuinely thought about it. He'd say, "This guy's got money, but he doesn't have much sense. He's bought this very complicated pod that never worked properly." And we'd just soak in all that stuff. That showed just how imaginative and invested in the whole galaxy he was.

What were the first characters you worked on for the film?

Once I had been given a job on the show, I spoke to Rob and let him know that I was really interested in doing some droids if I could, ▶

because I *love* robots. So, he gave me the destroyer droids (or droidekas), right off the bat, and told me to figure out their unfold process, as well as their walk. The walk was actually the hardest thing to do because concept artist Doug Chiang hadn't actually *designed* them to move like that. They had really short legs, just segmented things with a little pointy end. There was no foot there to flex and give you extra movement. I used to give Doug a hard time about it, like, "Come on, you know, there are no animals naturally with three legs for good reason!" [*laughs*]. He told me, "I never planned for them to walk!"

Doug's idea had been that they would roll into position, pop up and become a tri-pod gun platform, and then just start shooting. If they needed to go somewhere else, they'd fold back up and roll away. But George wanted the destroyer droids to have a bit of a gunslinger feel, because they had those two big guns at the sides. If you look at a droideka from the front, its two forward appendages look bow-legged, and that's due to the nature of how they're designed. It was very tricky figuring out how to give them a credible walk so that they looked balanced and still kind of menacing.

06

Was Watto a tough character to get right?

Linda Bel was the lead animator on Watto, and there was a little group of us working on shots of him, including Tim Harrington and Sue Campbell. We never really understood how he flew, because his wings were so stubby, but we joked that his belly maybe had like a lighter-than-air gas in it, which could also be kind of a propellant [*laughs*].

I did the shot in the podrace hangar, which was an absolutely gorgeous miniature set, where Watto says, "What, you think you're some kind of Jedi?" He had that elephant seal-like nose that kind of hung over his mouth, and those snaggle teeth that stuck out, so that was a really fun piece of dialogue to animate.

07

06 How Watto's little wings kept him airborne was the butt of the animator's jokes.

07 Boss Nass, voiced by Brian Blessed.

You also worked on another big character, Boss Nass. What was that like?

The entire process for Boss Nass was really daunting. Rob had promoted me to a creature and character lead, and put me in charge of Boss Nass, as played impeccably by Brian Blessed. His physicality was just perfect for the character, as was his voice.

We were provided with video footage from his dialog recording sessions, but Brian didn't really act anything out physically during them. Like most voice actors, he was at a lectern in a small booth wearing his reading glasses, but there was just something about him. He was wonderful to watch, and his performance was so

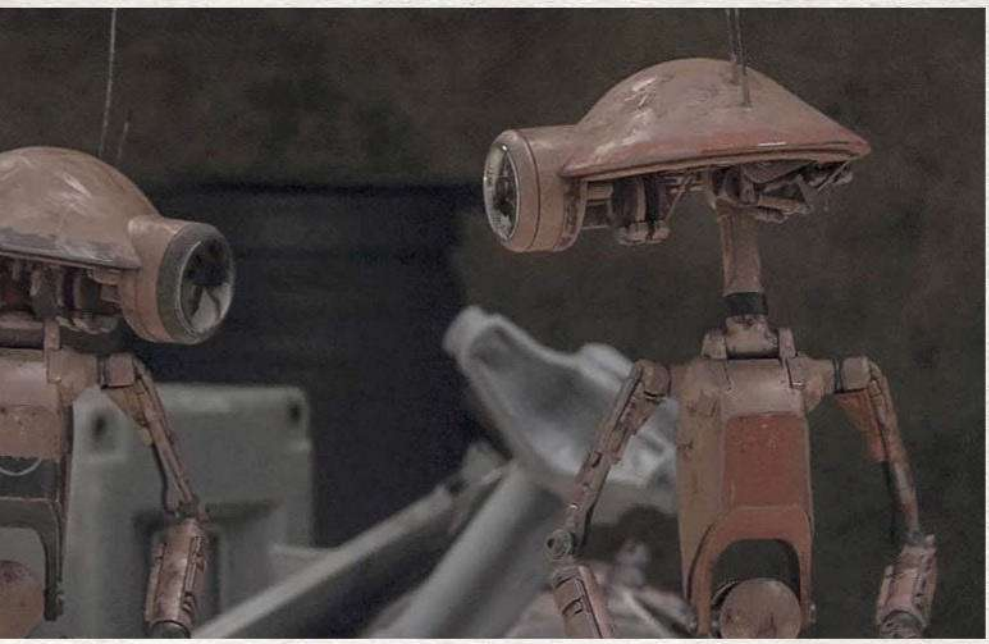
inspiring that we took whatever we could from the footage.

There are a lot of elements of Boss Nas that people now might take for granted, but at the time they were groundbreaking. Boss Nass had his long robes, and we only had fledgling cloth simulation, so while we didn't have to hand-animate the cloth it was difficult, as we were just at the beginning of that technology. What we didn't have back then, however, was any kind of flesh simulation. For shots where he does that shake with his mouth, I had to animate all of that totally by hand. Every jiggle.

original trilogy. There's a lot to it, in terms of the design of things and what makes things feel like "right" in the galaxy far, far away. Doug Chiang is obviously a master at it, and he's the torchbearer of Ralph McQuarrie. Dave Filoni is George's torchbearer in terms of the soul of *Star Wars*. But on the animation side, we have to think about those things, too. We're often designing shots of ships departing or arriving on planets, landing or taking off from locations, or in dogfights. It's very easy to do something where you go, "Huh, that actually feels more like *Star Trek*."

"GEORGE WANTED THE DESTROYER DROIDS TO HAVE A BIT OF A GUNSLINGER FEEL."

08



08 Pit droids are one example of callbacks to *The Phantom Menace* in *The Mandalorian*.

Twenty-five years on, what is the legacy that *The Phantom Menace* left behind at ILM?

Technology changes, but the creative conversations remain the same. On *The Mandalorian*, we had similar discussions that we'd had on *The Phantom Menace*: "Should this be a puppet? Should it be CG?" And, quite often, things are both. We also had constant debates about whether things are "*Star Wars*" or not, which is something I feel like I've had to learn over the years. I couldn't have put that into words back on *The Phantom Menace*, even though I'd grown up with the

Of course, one of the things Jon Favreau loves to do in the Mandoverse is to take an all-but-forgotten, very minor creature, like the blurrg from *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor* (1985) and give it a prominent place in his story. We've been doing that with *The Phantom Menace* designs, like the N-1 starfighter and the pit droids. It's been super fun, and there will always be another prequel shout-out, another thing Jon will pluck out. It's all just part of a constantly evolving legacy.

STAR WARS WINS

Hal Hickel's work at ILM has been recognized with multiple awards nominations and wins, including an Academy Award for Best Achievement in Visual Effects Oscar for *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* in 2007. His *Star Wars* awards include:

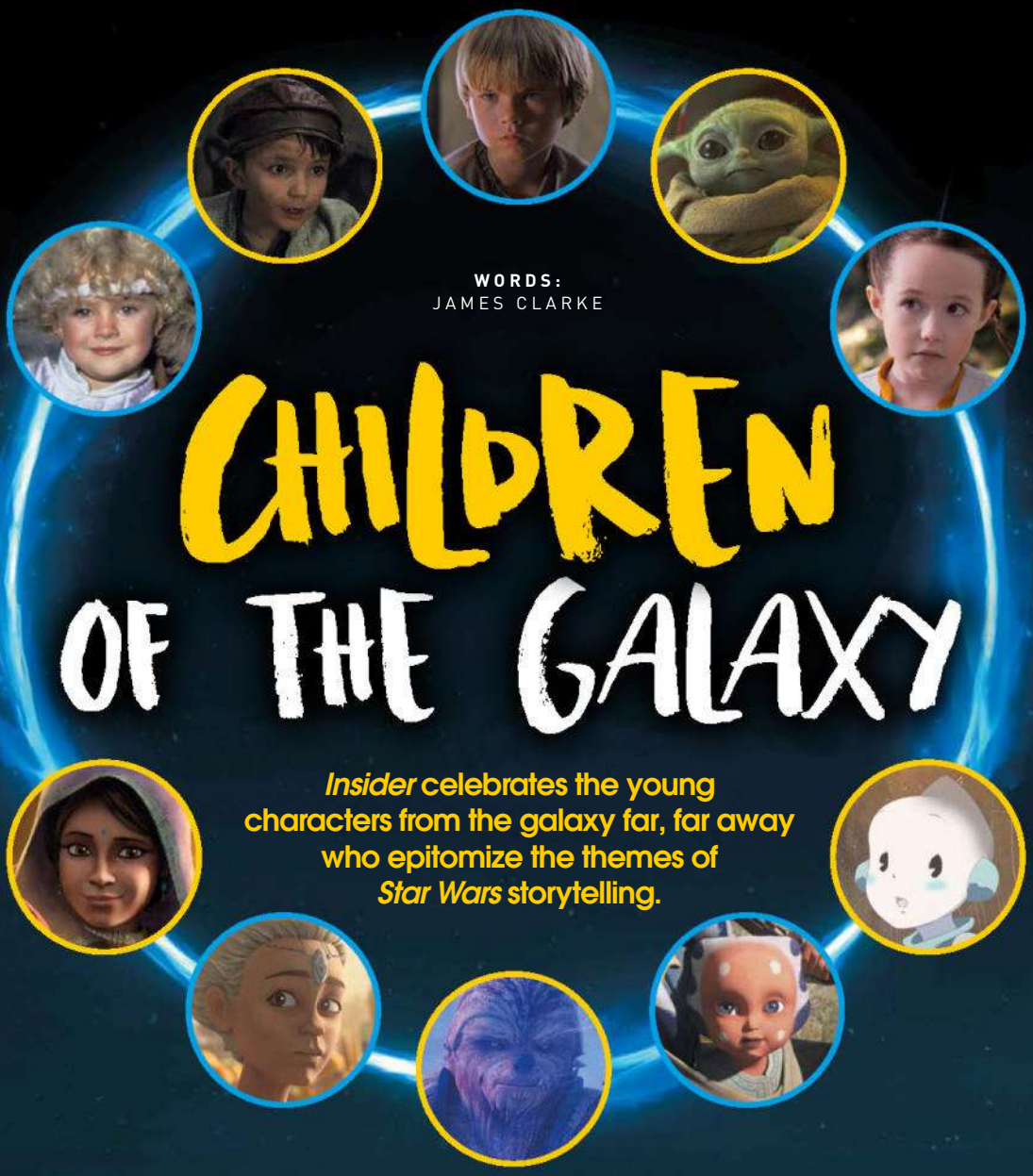
Rogue One: A Star Wars Story
2017 Saturn Awards
Winner: Best Special Effects
Shared with: John Knoll, Mohen Leo, and Neil Corbould

***The Mandalorian*: Chapter 2 "The Child"**
2020 Primetime Emmy
Winner: Outstanding Special Visual Effects
Shared with: Richard Bluff , Jason Porter, Abbigail Keller, Hayden Jones, Roy K. Cancino, John Rosengrant, Enrico Damm, and Landis R. Fields IV

The Mandalorian
2021 Primetime Emmy
Winner: Outstanding Special Visual Effects in a Season or a Movie
Shared with: Joe Bauer, Richard Bluff, Abbigail Keller, Roy K. Cancino, John Knoll, Enrico Damm, John Rosengrant, and Joseph Kasparian

***The Mandalorian*: Chapter 13 "The Jedi"**
2021 Visual Effects Society Awards
Winner: Outstanding Animated Character in an Episode or Real-Time Project
Shared with: John Rosengrant, Peter W. Clarke, and Scott Patton

***The Mandalorian*: Chapter 9 "The Marshal"**
2021 Visual Effects Society Awards
Winner: Outstanding Visual Effects in a Photoreal Episode
Shared with: Joe Bauer, Abbigail Keller, Richard Bluff, and Roy K. Cancino



WORDS:
JAMES CLARKE

CHILDREN OF THE GALAXY

Insider **celebrates the young characters from the galaxy far, far away who epitomize the themes of *Star Wars* storytelling.**

"Truly wonderful, the mind of a child is," Jedi Master Yoda wisely said to Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002). Yoda's affirmation of the potential of children is a notion close to the heart of the saga and reminds us that the spirit of fairy tales is reflected in *Star Wars* storytelling.

In fairy tales, children embody and symbolize the idea of hope, often portrayed as virtuous and open-hearted (unless the moral of their story is that bad behavior will be rewarded in kind). That spirit is clear to see in the youngest heroes of the galaxy far, far away. The children of *Star Wars* are often the characters who ignite action and change or make a stand against tyranny. In *Star Wars: Visions* Volume 2, Season 2, Episode 8, "The Pit" (2023), it was a girl named Livy who moved the hearts and minds of the adults and young people around her to "follow the light" and liberate themselves.

The image of the diminutive hero confronting an immense power is as enduring a *Star Wars* theme as the recurring fairy-tale trope of a child lost in the wilderness, such as when Leia flees her pursuers in the forest of Alderaan in *Star Wars: Obi-Wan Kenobi* (2022), and Cindel flees Terak's monstrous marauders in *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor* (1985).

With so much storytelling focused on younger characters in *Visions*, *The Bad Batch* and *Young Jedi Adventures*, we celebrate the children who have made the *Star Wars* galaxy a better place to be.

Anakin Skywalker

Star Wars: The Phantom Menace

In *The Phantom Menace* (1999), we saw a young Anakin Skywalker who was kind, courageous, and untroubled by uncertainty. Anakin embodied the open-hearted ideal of a child in the fairy-tale mode when he reminded his mother that, just as Shmi would often tell him, people didn't help each other enough. Anakin's conviction that assisting Qui-Gon Jinn, Padmé Amidala, and Jar Jar Binks would be the right thing to do set in motion the boy's entire destiny.

When we saw him leave home with Qui-Gon to embark on his Jedi training, Anakin was reluctant to leave Shmi. She took a moment to comfort her son, saying that, "You can't stop change any more than you can stop the suns setting." Anakin's ongoing reluctance, through his childhood and beyond, to accept change would become the source of his tragic turn to the dark side.

Ahsoka Tano

Star Wars: Tales of the Jedi

"Life and Death," the first episode of the series of animated shorts *Tales of the Jedi* (2022), introduced us to a very young Ahsoka Tano, revealing how the toddler spent her early years being raised in a village at the edge of a forest wilderness on her homeworld.

The story showed how Ahsoka first revealed her connection to the Force through her highly attuned association with the natural world, thanks in part to a lesson she had learned from her mother, Pav-ti, "Everything is life. Value it."

Lost and alone in the forest, the child was menaced by a sabertoothed beast known as a raxshir, yet ultimately the animal proved to pose no threat to her. While Ahsoka's family and neighbors aggressively hunted for the fearsome creature, worried that it might harm the missing child, Ahsoka's gentle spirit protected her and allowed her to bond with the perceived threat. As it approached the toddler, Ahsoka's wide eyes displayed no fear. This harmonious connection with the world around her is key to understanding Ahsoka's emerging powers and the Jedi she became.

TEMIRI BLAGG

Star Wars: The Last Jedi

When we first met Temiri in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017), he was working in the fathier stables on Canto Bight with his stablemates Oniho Zaya and Arashell Sar, and being treated meanly by his owner, Bargwill Tomder. Temiri's apparent anonymity and lowly status at that moment couldn't possibly have suggested what his potential really was.

When the film returned to Temiri, in its starry-eyed final scene, we saw him summon the Force for a very modest task. We watched Temiri as he swept the floor around the stables and then, with his hand on the broom and caught by a light at just the right moment, the broom became an imaginary lightsaber as Temiri raised it to the night sky and the potential awaiting him and other children. In that moment, as the *Millennium Falcon* streaked across the night sky, Temiri symbolized General Leia Organa's promise in the previous scene that the Resistance had all they needed to create a new galaxy.

CINDEL TOWANI

Star Wars: The Ewok Adventure and *The Battle for Endor*

Cindel Towani, the young hero of the vintage *Star Wars* television movies, *The Ewok Adventure* and *The Battle for Endor*, embodied the spirit of the brave and resourceful child contending with monsters. In *The Ewok Adventure* (1984), she and her brother, Mace, strove to rescue their parents who had been taken prisoner by a giant beast called the Gorax. Where Mace was angry and impatient with the Ewoks, Cindel proved to be far more open to the Ewok culture. This attitude had a positive outcome, with the Ewoks traveling with Mace and Cindel to the creature's lair.

In *The Battle for Endor*, Cindel was orphaned and had to act quickly and courageously, placing ever more trust in her friendship with Wicket W. Warwick and the entire Ewok community. Cindel's inquisitive spirit led her to discover a hermit named Noa Briqualon, where she challenged him to leave behind his comfortable, solitary existence and join her in a mission to rescue Ewoks from imprisonment in the castle of Queen Charal. Through her adventure, Cindel learned not to take appearances at face value, especially when she encountered a kindly young woman in the Endor forest. Her initial enchantment turned to terror as the woman transformed into the witch, Charal!

GROGU

Star Wars: The Mandalorian

Becoming an instant fan favorite when he was found by bounty hunter Din Djarin in the opening chapter of the Disney+ series *The Mandalorian*, Grogu's child-like curiosity and playfulness belied his tragic history as a survivor of Order 66. Whether it was his training in the Force or his beguiling innocence that kept him under the Empire's radar for decades we may never know, but the child more than proved his worth after he became the ward of Djarin. Despite the bounty hunter seeing himself as Grogu's protector, it was the diminutive foundling who saved the Mandalorian's neck on numerous occasions, channeling the Force to stop a rampaging mudhorn in its tracks, and later repelling a fiery explosion that could have killed Djarin and Bo-Katan Kryze.

PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA

Star Wars: Obi-Wan Kenobi

Even at a young age, Princess Leia displayed her inquisitive and resourceful nature, albeit within the safe (and somewhat cosseted) environment reserved for Alderaanian royalty. Determined to prove to her adoptive parents that she was going to be her own person rather than fulfill the expectations of others, Leia often found herself in deep trouble, but never more so than when the Inquisitorius had her kidnapped as bait to lure Obi-Wan Kenobi out of hiding.

The adventure was Leia's first experience of the realities of the galaxy, as she witnessed the daily struggle of its citizens, corruption and piracy, and the crushing inhumanity of the Empire. Yet in the face of what must have been a terrifying string of events, she displayed compassion and resoluteness, and earned the friendship and trust of a Jedi Knight who, before he met her, had feared for the future. It was Leia who gave Obi-Wan the hope that he had lost.

OMEGA

Star Wars: The Bad Batch

In Season One of *The Bad Batch*, Kaminoan cloner Lama Su described Omega as being "one with a curious mind." The child was marked as special because she could think and act independently.

As her adventures alongside Clone Force 99 unfolded, Omega became increasingly aware of her own potential, and of the complexities of the world around her. She repeatedly questioned situations that she encountered and the actions of others; her optimism and sense of right and wrong allowed her to see through dogma and received wisdom. Her determination to question why the clones had no representation in the Senate was just one example of her empathy towards the plight of others, such as her brothers in the Bad Batch and Gungi, the Wookiee and former Jedi who Omega formed a bond with on Kashyyyk.

GUNGI

Star Wars: The Clone Wars

Long before appearing in *The Bad Batch*, Gungi the Wookiee was introduced in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* Season 5, Episode 6: "The Gathering." Impulsive and emotional when he began his training, Gungi learned the value of patience, an understanding that led him to locate a kyber crystal for his lightsaber and graduate from youngling to Padawan.

In the years following Order 66, Gungi used his training to oppose the Empire, but he was eventually captured by a criminal cartel known as the Vanguard Axis. Rescued by Omega and the Bad Batch, Gungi returned with them to his homeworld, where he fought alongside his new friends and members of an embattled Wookiee tribe to liberate their village from an attacking force of Trandoshans and a unit of Imperial soldiers.

T0-B1

Star Wars: Visions Volume 1

Star Wars: Visions realized many young characters that existed outside of *Star Wars* continuity, in a space where animators were encouraged to reimagine the themes and ideas of the saga. One such creation was the inquisitive and adventurous T0-B1, a droid that dreamed of being a Jedi warrior and desperately wanted to embark on his own adventure. Living with his inventor, Professor Mitaka, T0-B1 was like any other child, in that he didn't always do what he was told. In defying Mitaka's instruction not to enter the basement of their home, the droid set in motion a devastating chain of events, leading to the arrival of an Inquisitor. Having bested the evil being, T0-B1 seized an opportunity to turn Mitaka's dreams of terraforming their world into a reality and departed to follow his Jedi calling and help others in need across the galaxy.

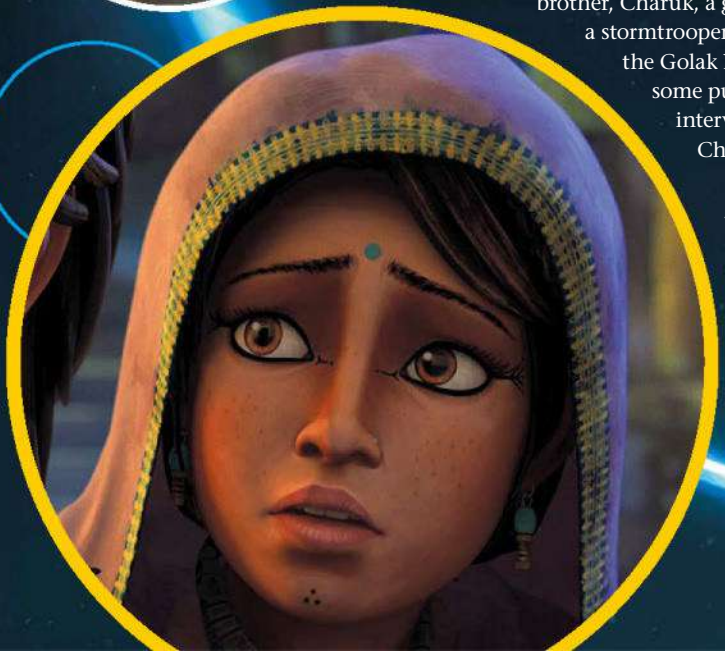
RANI

Star Wars: Visions Volume 2

Another intriguing *Star Wars: Visions* take on a potential young Jedi was Rani, a character from Volume 2, Episode 7, "The Bandits of Golak." Besides being attuned to the Force, Rani's gentle, playful nature was her greatest strength, but it would get her into deep water.

While traveling aboard a hovertrain across a desert planet with her brother, Charuk, a group of strangers noticed Rani's Force abilities and alerted a stormtrooper. Her casual use of her powers again caused a problem at the Golak Motel, where it drew the attention of an Inquisitor and some purge troopers. Thankfully, an old woman named Rugal intervened, revealing herself to be a Jedi and saving Rani and Charuk in a display of lightsaber prowess.

Just as Anakin Skywalker left home with Qui-Gon Jinn to learn the ways of the Force in *The Phantom Menace*, Rani had to leave her brother behind to follow Rugal into a secret underwater tunnel—her path to a new destiny.



STAR WARS

AHSOKA

SEASON ONE COMPANION

Taking a much-loved character from her animated roots into live action, *Star Wars: Ahsoka* picked up threads from previous shows *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, *Star Wars Rebels*, *The Mandalorian*, and *The Book of Boba Fett*, while setting up new battlefronts for future stories. With Dave Filoni hard at work on a second season of the hit show, *Insider* looks back at the events of Season One.

WORDS: JAY STOBIE

Ahsoka Tano was originally envisaged by George Lucas as a foil for Anakin Skywalker in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*; an apprentice for the impetuous Jedi who would, conversely, teach her master responsibility. What no one expected was that Ahsoka would be the breakout star of that series, going on to become one of *Star Wars*' most revered characters, with a fanbase of her own.

As he was developing a Disney+ series centered around Ahsoka, the theme of master and apprentice was again at the forefront of creator Filoni's mind.

"It has been a long road in evolving her from Anakin's young Padawan, and she has grown into quite a special character in her own right," he explains. "She's been through a lot of *Star Wars* history, and her past gives us a look into her behavior and why she is the way she is. Ahsoka is trying to figure out if she is even capable of teaching Sabine Wren, '*Is she going to be a good teacher? Is Sabine going to be a good student?*' The struggle between master and apprentice is very central to the show."

"'Apprenticeship' is what the whole show is about," adds executive producer Jon Favreau. "That's what Ahsoka wrestles with as she deals with Sabine. That inherent need to come together in order to pass down knowledge and to help save the galaxy."

Rosario Dawson was cast in the role for Ahsoka's leap into live action for the second season of *The Mandalorian*, and immediately put her own mark on the character. Mary Elizabeth Winstead, who played *Rebels* veteran General Hera Syndulla in *Ahsoka*, had worked with Dawson previously. "Rosario is so cool," she says. "Just being in her presence feels kind of special, and I think that's right for Ahsoka, who holds that kind of presence as well. I think Rosario is the perfect person for that."

"Rosario Dawson is such an incredibly powerful actor, and she loves this character," confirms executive producer and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy. "Everything about who Ahsoka is, what she represents, that interesting tension that exists between good and evil, dark and light—all of that she has brought to life in a way that almost no one else could." ▶

PART ONE
MASTER AND APPRENTICE

Directed by Dave Filoni
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: August 22, 2023

Baylan Skoll and Shin Hati intercept a New Republic starship and free Morgan Elsbeth from custody. Elsewhere, after recovering a mysterious object, Ahsoka Tano rendezvouses with General Hera Syndulla and shares that the spherical artifact contains a map that could show them the whereabouts of Grand Admiral Thrawn… and their long-lost friend, Ezra Bridger.

Hera suggests Sabine Wren could help unlock the device, so Tano seeks out her former Padawan on Lothal. Their reunion is tense, leading Ahsoka to the realization that she had walked away from Sabine just as she had walked away from her own master, Anakin Skywalker. Despite their differences, the possibility of finding Ezra convinces Sabine to assist Ahsoka.

Later, Sabine successfully unlocks the device, which promptly projects a holographic star map, connecting their galaxy to another, far, far away. But before she can pass this information on to Ahsoka, HK-87 assassin droids attack and steal the map. Sabine is confronted by a lightsaber-wielding Shin Hati, and having not used her own blade for some time, she is easily beaten. Hati impales Sabine and flees as Ahsoka arrives.

INSIDER INTEL
TANO'S TALE

"I love where Ahsoka is at [the start of the series]," says Rosario Dawson, the actor who brought Tano to life starting with Season Two of *The Mandalorian* in 2020. "She's just this samurai warrior, out there fighting and battling and being on the good side of things."

We soon learn that Ahsoka stepped away from training Sabine at some point, and the show takes its time revealing why. "There is a deep-seated fear that we start to explore with Ahsoka that has never left her, about watching [Anakin Skywalker], whom she loved and considered family, turn to the dark side," says Dawson.

PART TWO
TOIL AND TROUBLE

Directed by Steph Green
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: August 22, 2023

Recovering from her wounds, Sabine tells Ahsoka that the stolen map revealed the path between two galaxies. Ahsoka returns to Sabine's dwelling to look for clues and is confronted by another assassin droid. Dealing with it easily, she returns to Sabine with the droid's head, where the Mandalorian extracts details of its origin point from its memory core—factories on Corellia formerly affiliated with Morgan Elsbeth.

Baylan Skoll and Shin Hati convene with Elsbeth on the planet Seatos, where the activated device reveals the "Pathway to Peridea," the suspected location of Grand Admiral Thrawn.

On a tour of the Corellia shipyards where the HK-87 assassin droids were traced to, Ahsoka and Hera Syndulla uncover a plot by Imperial sympathizers to supply a massive hyperdrive core to Morgan Elsbeth. While Ahsoka duels Marrok on the docks, Hera and Chopper pursue the transport departing with the hyperdrive and secure a tracking device to its hull.

Meanwhile, Sabine retrieves her Mandalorian armor and acknowledges she is ready to train again. After visiting the Lothal monument honoring Ezra Bridger and the *Ghost* crew, she leaves the planet with Ahsoka and Professor Huyang.

Aboard the *Eye of Sion*, Morgan Elsbeth watches as the hyperdrive core is installed, vowing to deliver Thrawn from exile.

PART THREE
TIME TO FLY

Directed by Steph Green
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: August 29, 2023

En route to Seatos, Sabine resumes her Jedi training, overseen by Ahsoka and Huyang. Meanwhile, aboard *Home One*, General Hera Syndulla addresses the Senate Committee, who refuse to back her plea to divert the New Republic fleet to support Ahsoka's mission. Hera is frustrated and disappointed, although her mood is boosted by her son, Jacen, and his desire to become a Jedi.

No sooner has Tano's ship dropped out of hyperspace, some distance from Seatos, than it comes under attack by starfighters, led by Shin Hati and Marrok. Having detected a large, unknown object orbiting the planet, Huyang urges Ahsoka to fly closer, despite the enemy ships pursuing them. When turbolasers open fire on their ship and damage its shields, Ahsoka dons a spacesuit and takes to the vessel's hull, protecting the craft by deflecting incoming blasts with her lightsabers. In an effort to shake off their attackers, Sabine pilots the ship into the atmosphere of Seatos, where they lose themselves among a pod of purrgil.

Hiding on the planet's surface, Huyang reveals his scans suggest that Morgan Elsbeth's vast starship, the *Eye of Sion*, is capable of a hyperspace jump of astonishing speed and distance. Huyang cites old data about intergalactic hyperspace lanes following purrgil migration routes. As starfighters survey the forest, Baylan Skoll orders Elsbeth's soldiers to locate Ahsoka.

INSIDER INTEL
SABINE'S STORY

"One thing I love about Sabine's journey is that she struggles with her emotions, she's impulsive," explains actor Natasha Liu Bordizzo. "She's got good intentions but so many unfair things are happening around her and to her, and she doesn't always make the right decisions."

Bordizzo trained for three months before filming commenced. "The physicality of the role is completely tied in with the identity of the character—they can't be separated," she says. "I really had been swinging a sword for months, every single day, and it just felt like part of my arm at that point, and I was very used to my blasters. We were all really committed to the intensity of the action that this show required, and I'm really proud of what we did."

PART FOUR
FALLEN JEDI

Directed by Peter Ramsey
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: September 5, 2023

Still in hiding on Seatos, Ahsoka and Sabine weigh up their options, with Tano suggesting that they might need to destroy the map to prevent Grand Admiral Thrawn's return. Meanwhile, Hera Syndulla disobeys orders and rallies support from several pilots to follow her on a mission to help her friends.

Tasked with guarding the map while droids aboard the *Eye of Sion* calculate the hyperspace coordinates for Peridea, Baylan Skoll dispatches Marrok and Shin Hati to confront Ahsoka. They battle the former Jedi and her Padawan in the forest, but Ahsoka defeats Marrok and heads for Skoll's location while Sabine keeps Shin occupied.

Ahsoka is able to dislodge the map before the hyperspace calculations can be completed, but Skoll sends her tumbling off a cliff edge. Sabine witnesses her master's apparent demise and threatens to destroy the map, but she is persuaded not to when Skoll offers her the chance to be reunited with Ezra. In space, the *Ghost* drops out of hyperspace only to witness Morgan Elsbeth's departure aboard the *Eye of Sion*.

Ahsoka awakens in an ethereal realm and senses the presence of her former master, Anakin Skywalker.

PART FIVE
SHADOW WARRIOR

Directed by Dave Filoni
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: September 12, 2023

While General Hera Syndulla searches Seatos for Ahsoka and Sabine to no avail, Anakin Skywalker teaches Ahsoka one final lesson. On the shoreline overlooking the ocean, Jacen Syndulla senses something happening in the water. He and his mother listen as the sounds of crashing waves transform into that of clashing lightsabers. With hope renewed, Hera orders Carson to have his squadron sweep the ocean again.

Ahsoka finds herself on a Clone Wars battlefield with Anakin, facing her guilt over clone trooper casualties. Anakin grows weary of her self-doubt, and ignites his lightsaber, reiterating the choice he has offered her—to live or die. Ahsoka chooses to live.

Recovered from the ocean, Ahsoka is reunited with Hera and Huyang, and deduces that Sabine has gone with Baylan Skoll. Theorizing that the purrgil might carry them to the distant galaxy, Ahsoka uses the Force to communicate with one of the huge creatures. The purrgil allows Ahsoka and Huyang to land their ship within its cavernous mouth, and jumps into hyperspace.

PART SIX
FAR, FAR AWAY

Directed by Jennifer Getzinger
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: September 19, 2023

Morgan Elsbeth's faction reaches Peridea, the ancient homeworld of the Dathomiri. Greeted by three Great Mothers at a towering fortress, Elsbeth watches as Thrawn's battered Star Destroyer approaches. Having disembarked, the grand admiral fulfills his debt to the witches by transporting their cargo back to the home galaxy.

Thrawn expresses gratitude to Sabine for her aid in his liberation and allows her to leave to search for Ezra Bridger. He then tasks Baylan Skoll and Shin Hati with eliminating them both.

After fighting off a bandit attack in the wilds of Peridea, Sabine encounters the local Noti, who wear pendants with the symbol of the Rebel Alliance etched upon them. They lead Sabine to their camp, where she is finally reunited with Ezra.

Thrawn and Elsbeth are confident their mission is proceeding as planned until the Great Mothers inform them that a Jedi has followed them to Peridea. Assuming that Jedi is Ahsoka Tano, Thrawn asks the witches to employ their dark magick once more.

PART SEVEN
DREAMS AND MADNESS

Directed by Geeta Vasant Patel
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: September 26, 2023

On Coruscant, Senator Hamato Xiono voices displeasure at General Hera Syndulla's unauthorized mission to Seatos. Only a timely intervention by C-3PO on behalf of Senator Leia Organa prevents her from being court-martialed. Despite the opinions of her colleagues, Mon Mothma is troubled by Hera's report concerning the potential return of Grand Admiral Thrawn.

Upon reaching Peridea, the purrgil find themselves in the midst of an Imperial minefield. To escape the deadly ordnance, Ahsoka pilots her ship into a debris field—a purrgil graveyard—surrounding the planet, but they come under attack by Thrawn's starfighters. Hiding within the bones of a long-dead purrgil, Ahsoka reaches out with the Force and senses Sabine Wren on Peridea's surface.

Baylan Skoll and Shin Hati make ready to intercept Sabine and Ezra Bridger, but he informs her that she must continue alone. While Shin leads Peridea's nomadic bandits in an attack on the Noti, her former master confronts Ahsoka Tano. Ahsoka evades Baylan, joining Sabine and Ezra to protect the Noti. The battle grants Thrawn time to load his cargo, yet Shin chooses to retreat rather than accept Ahsoka's offer to help her. Pleased to be back among his friends, Ezra expresses optimism that he will soon be going home.

PART EIGHT
THE JEDI, THE WITCH, AND THE WARLORD

Directed by Rick Famuyiwa
Written by Dave Filoni
Premiered: October 3, 2023

With the cargo transfer completed, Grand Admiral Thrawn vows never to underestimate a Jedi again and dispatches TIE fighters to the reported landing site of Ahsoka's shuttle. The Great Mothers reward Morgan Elsbeth with the Blade of Talzin and grant her the gift of shadows.

Preparing for the imminent battle to stop Thrawn, Ezra Bridger constructs a new lightsaber in Huyang's workshop, and reminisces about his master, Kanan Jarrus. Outside the ship, Ahsoka promises to stand by her Padawan, and the trio set off towards the citadel.

Once inside they are faced with an army of Night Troopers, reanimated by the dark magick of the Great Mothers, and must fight their way to the top of the citadel where the *Eye of Sion* has docked with Thrawn's Star Destroyer. Sabine uses the Force to help push Ezra aboard the ship as he leaps towards it, but she chooses to remain with Ahsoka, who is engaged in a duel with Morgan Elsbeth.

Thrawn orders the citadel to be destroyed after Ahsoka strikes down Elsbeth, but thanks to the arrival of Huyang aboard their shuttle, the former Jedi and Sabine escape at the last second.

The grand admiral declares victory as his ship jumps into hyperspace, leaving Ahsoka and Sabine to return to the

Noti. Meanwhile, Shin Hati seeks out the nomads, and Baylan Skoll marches toward a distant calling.

In the home galaxy, Thrawn's Star Destroyer sets course for Dathomir. Ezra steals an Imperial shuttle and travels to *Home One*, where he is reunited with Hera Syndulla and Chopper. On Peridea, what seems to be Anakin Skywalker's Force spirit watches over Ahsoka and Sabine as they prepare for an uncertain future, far from home.

THE FLASHING BLADE

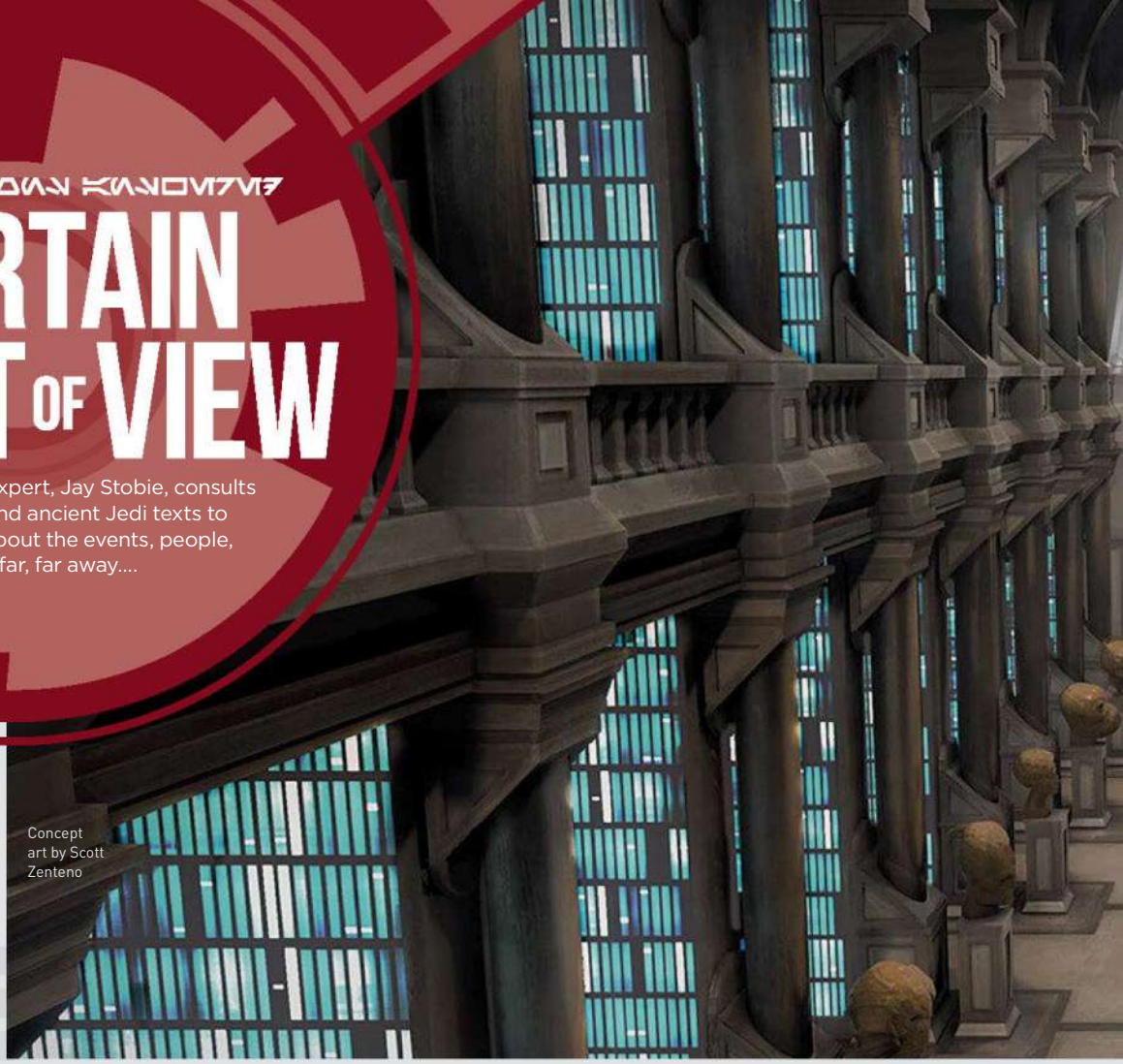
***Star Wars: Ahsoka* delivers thrilling lightsaber action in every episode, and it required a particular skillset to realize the breathtaking duels on screen.**

"There are things about the Jedi that feel like the samurai," explains *Ahsoka* creator, writer, director and executive producer Dave Filoni. "For a trained warrior, the sword is the last thing they'd resort to, not the first," he says. "The sword doesn't make you powerful. Your will, your self-control, and your thoughts are what make you powerful. To express this, we needed a real martial artist to work with the actors, so we hired Ming Qiu and her team."

"Ming is a Jedi Master," confirms Rosario Dawson, when asked about working with the respected stunt performer and martial-arts expert. "She is someone who has worked hard since she was a child, so she doesn't accept folks not giving her three-hundred percent. I have a photo with Ming where I'm sweating so much it looks like someone poured water over me. She would ask me all the time, 'Am I too tough?' and I'm, like, 'No, I love it. I really love it.' For her, if you're not breaking a sweat, you're not even scratching the surface of how hard you need to be working."

A CERTAIN POINT OF VIEW

Our resident *Star Wars* expert, Jay Stobie, consults his library of holocrons and ancient Jedi texts to answer your questions about the events, people, and places of the galaxy far, far away....



Concept art by Scott Zenteno

"After Order 66 was given, the Jedi seemed to become more rumor than fact on most planets. Wouldn't the extensive archives throughout the galaxy have kept their memory alive?"
George Williams, London, UK

If the old adage "knowledge is power" holds true, then you might suspect that one's pursuit of unlimited power would rely heavily upon controlling the narrative. That is precisely the course Emperor Palpatine took when it came to his systematic eradication of the Jedi. In addition to dispatching Darth Vader and the Inquisitorius to hunt down survivors, Palpatine besmirched the Jedi by branding them as traitors through propaganda distributed across the Imperial HoloNet. Once their reputation had been undermined, the Galactic Empire could begin erasing these "outlaws" from official records and shaping history to its own whims. Palpatine even appropriated the Jedi Temple, home to the vaunted Jedi Archives, to become his personal palace!

One would be hard-pressed to find the truth about the Emperor's enemies at Scarif's citadel or within other Imperial-administered archives, but what happens when we become over reliant on the accuracy of even well-intentioned resources?

Essential Storytellers

C-3PO

Secluded away in Bright Tree Village on the eve of the Battle of Endor, C-3PO regaled the Ewoks with his stories about the Rebel Alliance's fight against the Empire. The Ewoks were riveted by the account, and C-3PO's history of events even inspired emotional responses from the likes of Han Solo and Leia Organa.

Dexter Jettster

As someone who ran weapons, crewed rigs, and prospected across the galaxy, Dexter Jettster became an invaluable resource for Obi-Wan Kenobi. Jettster identified a Kaminoan saberdart and recounted rumors about Kamino's connection to cloning, all while emphasizing the difference between knowledge and wisdom.

The Armorer

More than just the individual who outfitted Mandalorians with weaponry, the Armorer acted as a cultural historian for her sect. Upon reuniting with Din Djarin on the Glavis Ringworld, the Armorer conveyed details about the Darksaber and recollected Mandalore's downfall at the hands of the Empire during the Night of a Thousand Tears.

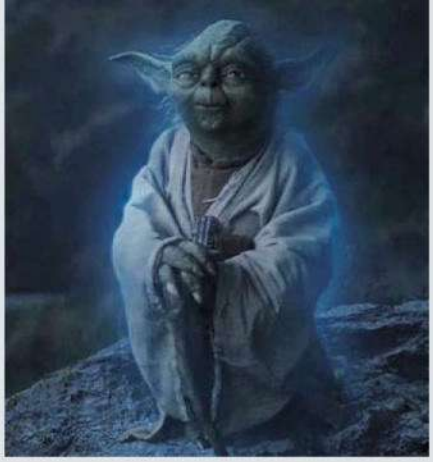
Obi-Wan Kenobi's investigation of a poisonous dart reunited him with Dexter Jettster, who emphasized the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Despite Dexter's warning, Kenobi was nevertheless baffled by his inability to locate Kamino in the Jedi Archives. The Order revered the library's completeness to such an extent that it took a consultation with Master Yoda, who called upon the viewpoint of younglings, to produce the relatively simple answer that someone had deleted the information. The collection of data remained important, but the story—filled with context and perspective—proved invaluable.

Professor Huyang

An ancient droid whose archive memory served as a repository for Jedi records, Professor Huyang often told stories to younglings at the Jedi Temple. These narratives included elements from the popular three-part *History of the Galaxy*, which Huyang also called upon as he traveled to Peridea alongside Ahsoka Tano.

Supreme Chancellor Palpatine

Aware that Anakin Skywalker's fate had reached a tipping point, Supreme Chancellor Palpatine seized the opportunity and recounted the Tragedy of Darth Plagueis the Wise at Coruscant's Galaxies Opera House. The tale proved to be a powerful lure to the dark side and aided in sending the young Jedi astray.



Given Yoda's enlightened nature, it's no surprise that he was also the Jedi who taught the same lesson to Luke Skywalker on Ahch-To. When a disillusioned Skywalker sought to burn the ancient library housing the sacred Jedi texts, Yoda urged him to look beyond a "pile of old books" and recognize that the trials he endured had taught him all he needed to know. While libraries were necessary and important, they needed real-world intuition and interpretation to truly be useful. Perhaps that was why wise individuals such as Yoda, Maz Kanata, and Lor San Tekka were so often sought out by those searching for understanding.

The Eye Of The Beholder

Before Yoda's intervention, Luke demonstrated another facet instrumental to controlling the narrative: the power of storytelling itself. Skywalker delivered a bleak account of the Jedi's legacy to Rey, describing their hubris, failure, and extinction. A tale so moving and profound that, in Luke's mind, it justified his belief that it was time for the Jedi to end. He continued, telling the young woman who had sought his help, about the night he'd confronted a young Ben Solo. Although certain details were similar, Luke and Kylo Ren's different versions of the story merely reinforced what they already felt within: Luke's doubts and Ben's call to the darkness. Similarly, when the Empire painted a picture of the Jedi as disreputable criminals, it wasn't difficult for the galaxy to accept that explanation and believe this "truth."

In one of his most momentous deceptions, Palpatine showed that he was not above utilizing a story to twist history in his favor. Fully cognizant of Anakin Skywalker's uncertainty about the Jedi, Palpatine relayed the Tragedy of Darth Plagueis the Wise in a way that struck at Anakin's fear of losing Padmé Amidala and brought him closer to becoming Palpatine's new apprentice. The tale proved so convincing that Anakin eventually turned into a key tool in the arsenal the Emperor used to wipe out the Jedi. Between storytelling's potential for influence and Palpatine's post-Order 66 strategy to control, alter, and undermine the narrative surrounding the Jedi, one can see how the Empire's propaganda machine turned the Jedi's exploits into the stuff of nightmares.

TALES OF THE TOMES

22 BSW4:
Madame Jocasta Nu, chief librarian of the Jedi Archives, had so much confidence in the comprehensiveness of the facility's records that she balked at Obi-Wan Kenobi's suggestion that the Archives might have been incomplete.

10 BSW4:
Before their coaxium heist on Vandor, Tobias Beckett and his gang sat around a campfire and shared stories about their aspirations. Chewbacca captivated the group with the tale about his search for his family.

5 BSW4:
Cassian Andor consumed Karis Nemik's rebellious manifesto prior to the uprising on Ferrix.

5 ASW4:
A Tusken chieftain revealed his tribe's history to Boba Fett using sign language to describe how his camp remained hidden after Tatooine's oceans had dried up, while other Tusken tribes survived by killing.

34 ASW4:
Convinced that the Jedi Order must end, Luke Skywalker set out to destroy the tree containing their sacred texts on Ahch-To. Master Yoda called upon a lightning strike to burn down the library, while unbeknownst to Skywalker, Rey had taken the Jedi tomes away on the *Millennium Falcon*.

34 ASW4:
Temiri Blagg listened intently as Oniho Zaya spun stories about Luke Skywalker's exploits. Zaya's words offered hope to the group of children who had endured a desperate life in the fathier stables of Canto Bight.

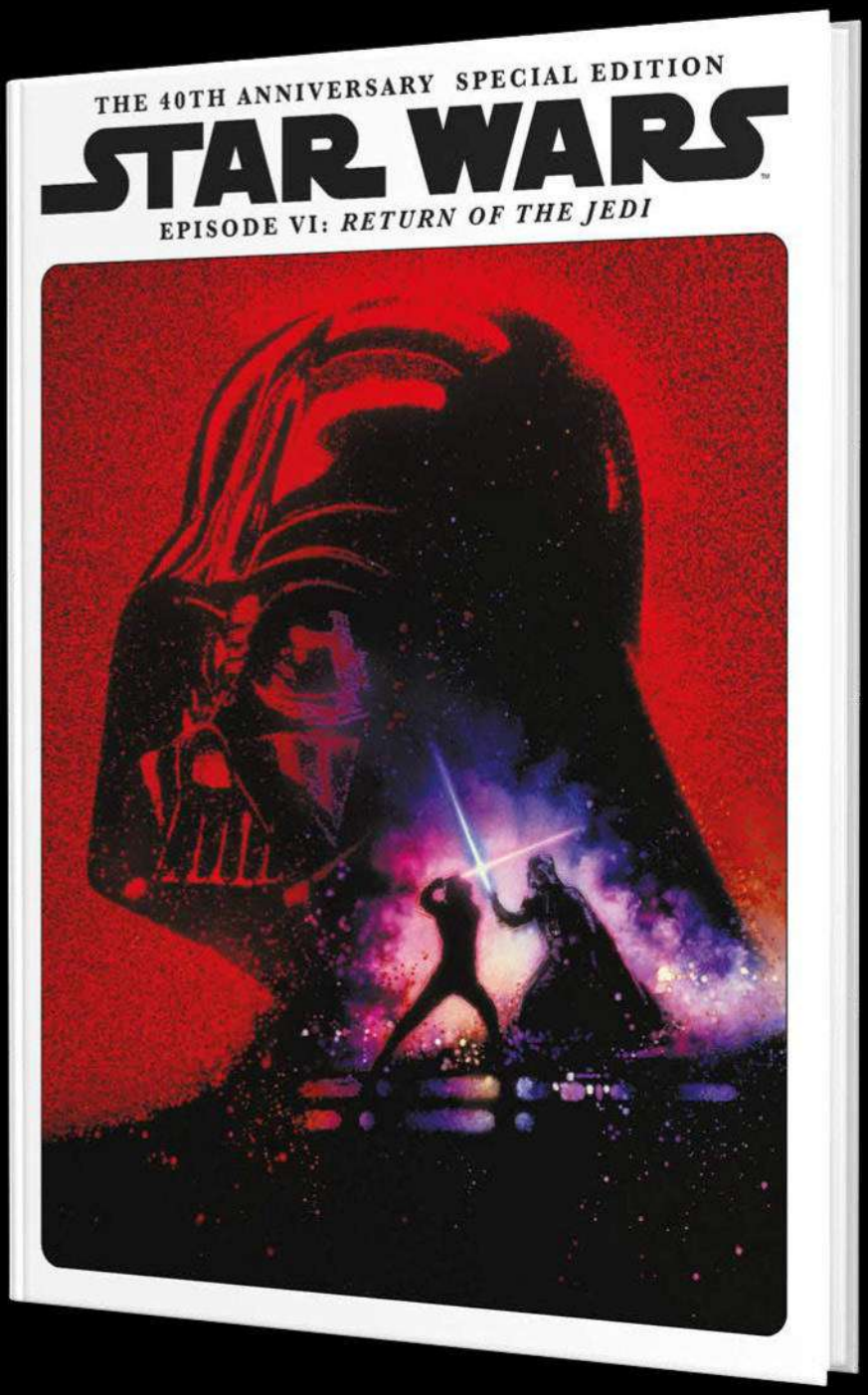
Tall Tales and Galactic Truth

From spinning half-truths in sabacc games to ensnaring Han Solo in Darth Vader's trap, Lando Calrissian was no stranger to tall tales. However, the smuggler parlayed his expertise in the narrative arts into *The Calrissian Chronicles*, a personal log documenting his adventures with L3-37, the Sharu, and others.

Karis Nemik also kept a journal on Aldhani, although his personal manifesto focused on the origins of rebellion throughout the galaxy, his reflections on authority and insurrection, and the need to persevere in the name of freedom.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Send your in-galaxy queries to starwarsinsider@titanemail.com with the subject header, "A Certain Point of View."



CELEBRATE THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE ORIGINAL *STAR WARS* TRILOGY!

Follow the making of the movie, from early script ideas, concept art, and costume designs, through to filming and its eventual release, lavishly illustrated with exceptional photography!

AVAILABLE FROM ALL GOOD BOOKSTORES & ONLINE

TITAN-COMICS.COM

© 2023 Lucasfilm Ltd & TM. All rights reserved.

RESOLUTE REBEL

Family, friendship, and the legendary Hera Syndulla

California-based *Star Wars* fan Nicole Jowett began cosplaying in high school after attending her first convention. "Seeing so many total strangers dressing up as their favorite characters, coming together and connecting over a shared love of something was a beautiful, eye-opening experience," she says. "It made me feel a little less alone in the world."

Star Wars Rebels struck a chord with Jowett, who found inspiration in the character Hera Syndulla. "She is witty, strong, and steadfastly fights for what she believes in," explains the fan. "Yet she is also compassionate, caring, and no matter how bad things get, Hera always holds on to hope."

The Syndulla outfit was the first time Jowett made a costume by hand, which she found to be both challenging and rewarding. "I hadn't sewn in years and don't even own a

INSIDER NEEDS YOU!

We want to hear from you! Tell us about your *Star Wars* experience. What made you want to become a fan? What have you done in the name of *Star Wars*? Tell us your *Star Wars* story by sending your photos, art, and letters here:

starwarsinsider@titanemail.com

Or via regular post:

UNITED STATES
***Star Wars Worldwide*, *Star Wars Insider*, Titan Magazines, 2819 Rosehall Lane, Aurora, IL, 60503, U.S.A.**

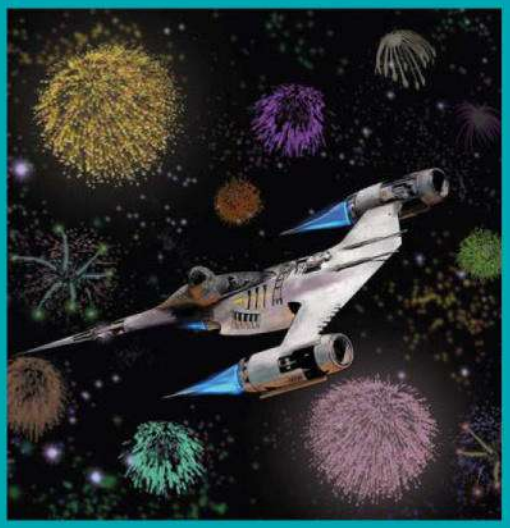
UNITED KINGDOM
***Star Wars Worldwide*, *Star Wars Insider*, 144 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0UP, U.K.**

sewing machine, but I dove right in and sewed everything by hand, which took an incredible amount of time and dedication."

Between sewing the costume, sanding and painting 3D-printed accessories, deliberating over contact-lens colors, and applying lekku and body paint, the process was so time consuming, Jowett was still sewing parts together the night before Emerald City Comic Con, where she debuted the cosplay. "Hearing people call out 'Hera!' when they saw me, asking for pictures, and running into others dressed as *Star Wars* characters, especially from *Rebels*, was such a special experience," she smiles. "Fandom is a strange and beautiful thing that brings all these strangers together, and I feel so lucky to be able to share that with others."

ARTISTS' ALLEY

Talented *Star Wars* fans share their amazing drawings inspired by the galaxy far, far away....



01 "BOONTA EVE" AND "THE CONVERT" BY ASHLEY RAYE

The Mandalorian's third season served as a source of inspiration for fan artist Ashley Raye. "The sight of the N-1 starfighter flying through the fireworks on Boonta Eve was a moment in episode two that simply made me smile," remarks Ashley. "I had been wanting to draw a detailed helmet for a while, and the gravity of Bo-Katan Kryze choosing to add a Mythosaur insignia to her armor inspired the design of that piece."

02 "THE SABERED HAND" BY MARCUS EAKERS

Kelleran Beq's appearance in *The Mandalorian* Season 3, Episode 4: "The Foundling" was a surprise, to be sure, but a welcome one. Viewers were ecstatic to see Ahmed Best in the role, as was artist Marcus Eakers, who commemorated the moment in creative fashion. Marcus explains that his fan art shows "Kelleran Beq displaying his range of lightsaber prowess and how he earned the nickname, 'Sabered Hand.'"

BOUNTY HUNTERS
Scouring the galaxy for the stars of *Star Wars*...

CRAFTSMANSHIP
KOTOBUKIYA

Meet the stars, show the evidence, win the bounty! Bounty Hunters is sponsored by Kotobukiya. Each issue's winner will receive a fantastic Kotobukiya *Star Wars* statue kit! To see more, visit www.facebook.com/kotobukiyaofficial.

DENISE GOUGH & GIANCARLO ESPOSITO:
The Empire's Finest

Andrew Parker poses with Denise Gough, who portrayed Dedra Meero in *Star Wars: Andor*.

Hailing from Liverpool, England, Andrew Parker had an incredible time at *Star Wars* Celebration Europe 2023 while enjoying a chat with Irish actor Denise Gough, known for playing Imperial Security Bureau agent Dedra Meero in *Star Wars: Andor*. The pair discussed everything from accents to theatre. "A mega person and a fantastic experience," Andrew recalls.

However, Gough was not the only Imperial the fan met at the event. Giancarlo Esposito, who has made quite the impression as Moff Gideon in *The Mandalorian*, also took a picture with Andrew. The two shared some words about Liverpool before pausing for their photo op. "That man is acting royalty," the fan declares. "He is a legend who lived up to my expectations," Andrew adds.

Andrew Parkers shares a moment with Giancarlo Esposito, who portrayed Moff Gideon in *Star Wars: The Mandalorian*.

FLUENT COMMUNICATION
A Costa Rican *Star Wars* fan's quest to learn English

"When I was around 8 years old, my father and I went to the movies to watch *La Guerra de las Galaxias*, the Spanish name for *Star Wars*, which means 'The War of the Galaxies,'" recalls Leonardo Meza, a teacher from Costa Rica. "It was like visiting a galaxy far away and living a wonderful adventure. At that time, my mother and I were in a bookstore and I saw the novelization of the movie." The book was in English, so Leonardo's mom chose not to buy it, despite his assertion that he would learn the language.

In high school, Leonardo finally got hold of the Marvel Comics' adaptation of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. "I wasn't willing to give up without a fight," remarks Leonardo. "I got an old English-Spanish dictionary, and then began translating that comic word by word, writing it all down on sheets of paper. That was the way I began reading *Star Wars* in English."

During college, Leonardo learned that Costa Rica was hiring people to teach English in elementary schools, and so began his almost 30-year career as a teacher, passing on what he had learned. This path led him to meet his wife, Kattya, firm friends including Sheri, Diego López, Jorge Sandoval, and Darío Montero, and gave him the opportunity to share his *Star Wars* fandom with the next generation through his son, Jonathan.

"I always tell this story about the *Star Wars* book to my students to let them know that if they have a dream, they have to work hard to reach it," says Leonardo. And yes, the fan *did* eventually purchase the original *Star Wars* novelization. "Although it took me 12 years to find it in a secondhand bookstore," he laughs.

STAGING GROUND

Martial arts and meditation with lightsaber cosplay

Stage combat performer and New York City-based fan Oliver Baer has participated in everything from choreographed fight scenes to off-off-Broadway plays. He considers himself more of a theatrical martial artist than a traditional cosplayer, since he enjoys performing as the character more than designing the costume itself. About 10 years ago, Baer started to perform with a group that stages shows with iconic *Star Wars* weapons: lightsabers!

While his extensive martial arts background (Baer has 30 years of experience) was helpful, performing with the group came with new challenges, particularly when it came to timing and choreography. "It takes me a while and a lot of repetition to learn movements," he explains. Baer has primarily studied Chinese internal martial arts, which include Tai Ji Quan, Ba Gua Zhang, and Xing I Quan. "In conjunction with martial arts, I also study Taoist meditation, since they all have a meditative component to them," he says.

Photos: Matthew Procaccini

Translating these skills into performing with lightsabers came naturally to Baer, thanks to his martial arts prectice. "There are specific weapons forms, which have applications, so it was not hard to put parts of those into a performance," Baer says. "The most rewarding part of performing is hearing from someone how much they enjoyed watching it. If they become invested in the story, the performance is a success, even if that story is as simple as who is fighting whom and why."

The Star Wars Archive

The behind-the-scenes story of a galaxy far, far away....

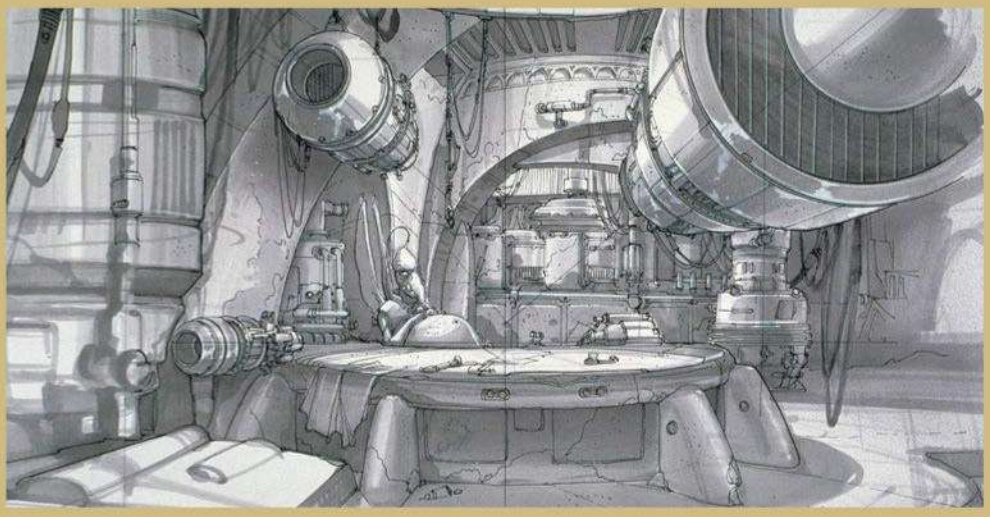
DRESSING UP THE SET

While concept artists such as Doug Chiang reimagined the look of the galaxy far, far away for *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (1999), it was the art department that was charged with turning those designs into practical sets and props.

Working under production designer Gavin Bouquet, one of the responsibilities of the art department team was to dress each set to create a convincing environment that evoked the *Star Wars* aesthetic. While more exotic locales such as Coruscant and Naboo brought new visual styles to the saga, the story's return to Tatooine was an opportunity to embrace the 'used' look established in *Star Wars: A New Hope* in 1977.

Watto's junkyard and workshop were decorated with mechanical ephemera sourced from scrap merchants and prop hire companies, just as *A New Hope*'s set decorator Roger Christian had done two decades earlier.

02



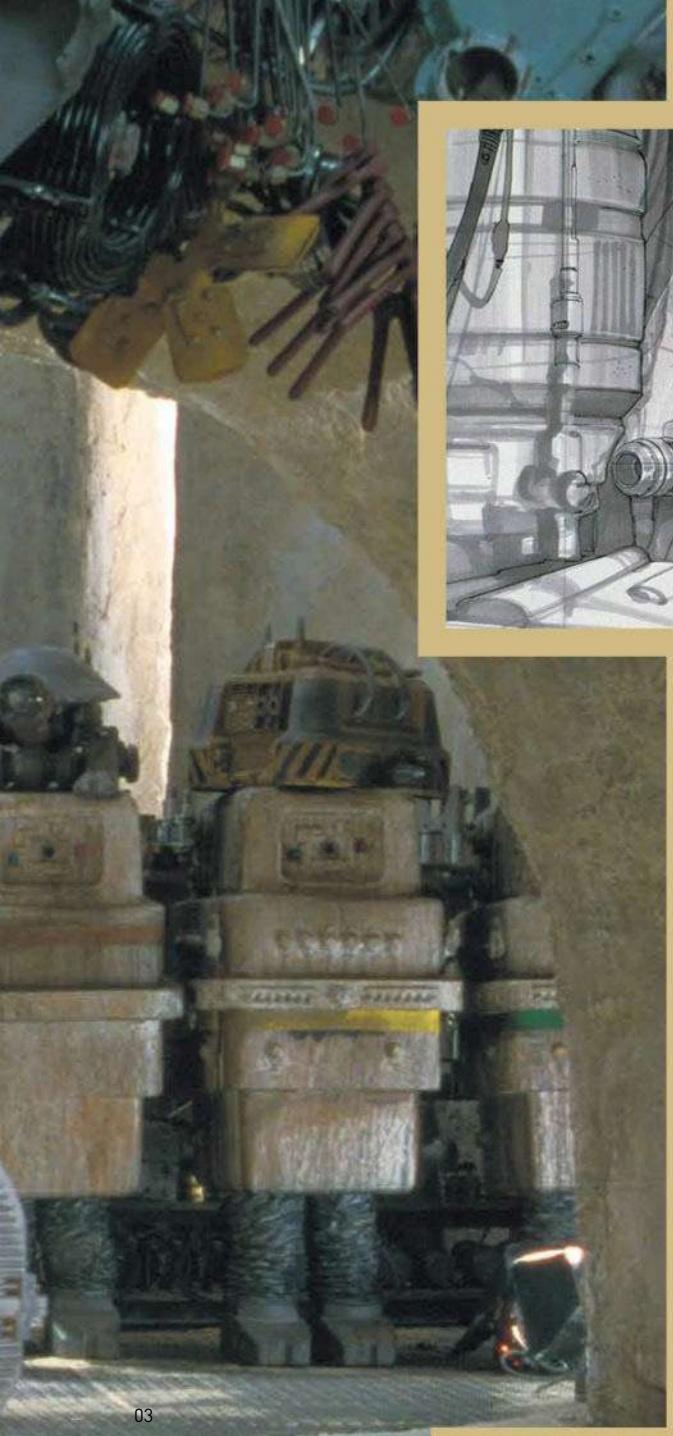
03

01 Among the unidentifiable pieces of junk decorating Watto's workshop, props including a protocol droid and several power droids were crucial to placing the set within the *Star Wars* galaxy.

02 Concept art of Watto's workshop by Doug Chiang.

03 Photographed during construction, the undressed set was yet to be imbued with the full *Star Wars* aesthetic.

04 The fully dressed set, decorated with specially made props, real-world engine parts, pipes, conduits, and other mechanical junk.



03

04

BECOME AN INSIDER &
SAVE OVER 30%!

STAR TOURS: THE CONTINUING ADVENTURES!
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE | ISSUE 2
STAR WARS INSIDER
Exclusive
An All-New The High Republic story!
Fiction!
Phantastic!
Celebrating 25 years of The Phantom Menace
The Bad Batch
Part Two of our exclusive look behind the scenes
Intergalactic Odyssey
Ahsoka Season One Companion
"WHAT HAVE WE HERE?"
BILLY DEE WILLIAMS ON PLAYING LANDO CALRISSI
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE | ISSUE 225
STAR WARS INSIDER
STAR WARS THE HIGH REPUBLIC
YOUR EXCLUSIVE SUBSCRIBER COVER

Your #1 source for EVERYTHING *Star Wars*!

- **SAVE $20!** 6 issues just $39.99 Newsstand price: ~~$59.94~~
- **EXCLUSIVE** subscriber cover!
- **FREE** home delivery! – never miss an issue!

U.S.	Canada	U.K.	Europe	Rest of the World
$39.99	$54.99	from £29.99	£47.99	$59.99

GET THE BEST PRICE – SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

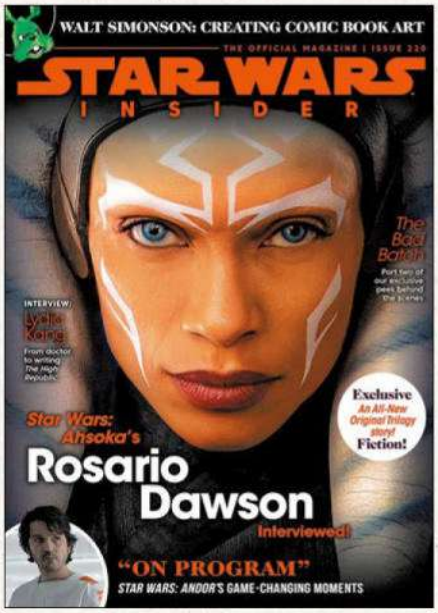
TITAN-COMICS.COM/INSIDER

U.S. ☎ 1 800 261 6502 or 847 559 7339 • Canada & ROW ☎ 847 559 7339 • U.K. & Europe ☎ +44 (0)1778 392085

EXPLORE THE *STAR WARS INSIDER* ARCHIVES

Check out these *Star Wars Insider* back issues...

THE HIGH REPUBLIC: PHASE II COMPANION
STAR WARS INSIDER
Exclusive An All-New Original Trilogy story! Fiction!
INTERVIEW: Dennis Muren & Ken Ralston
40 RETURN OF THE JEDI
STAR WARS CELEBRATION 2023
BEHIND THE SCENES AT STAR WARS LIVE!



GIANCARLO ESPOSITO: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!
STAR WARS INSIDER
Exclusive Star Wars: The High Republic Fiction!
INTERVIEWS: John Knoll
Star Wars: Timelines
Yub Nub!
RETURN OF THE JEDI
Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the original trilogy's final chapter
RISE OF THE REBELLION
ANDOR SEASON ONE COMPANION

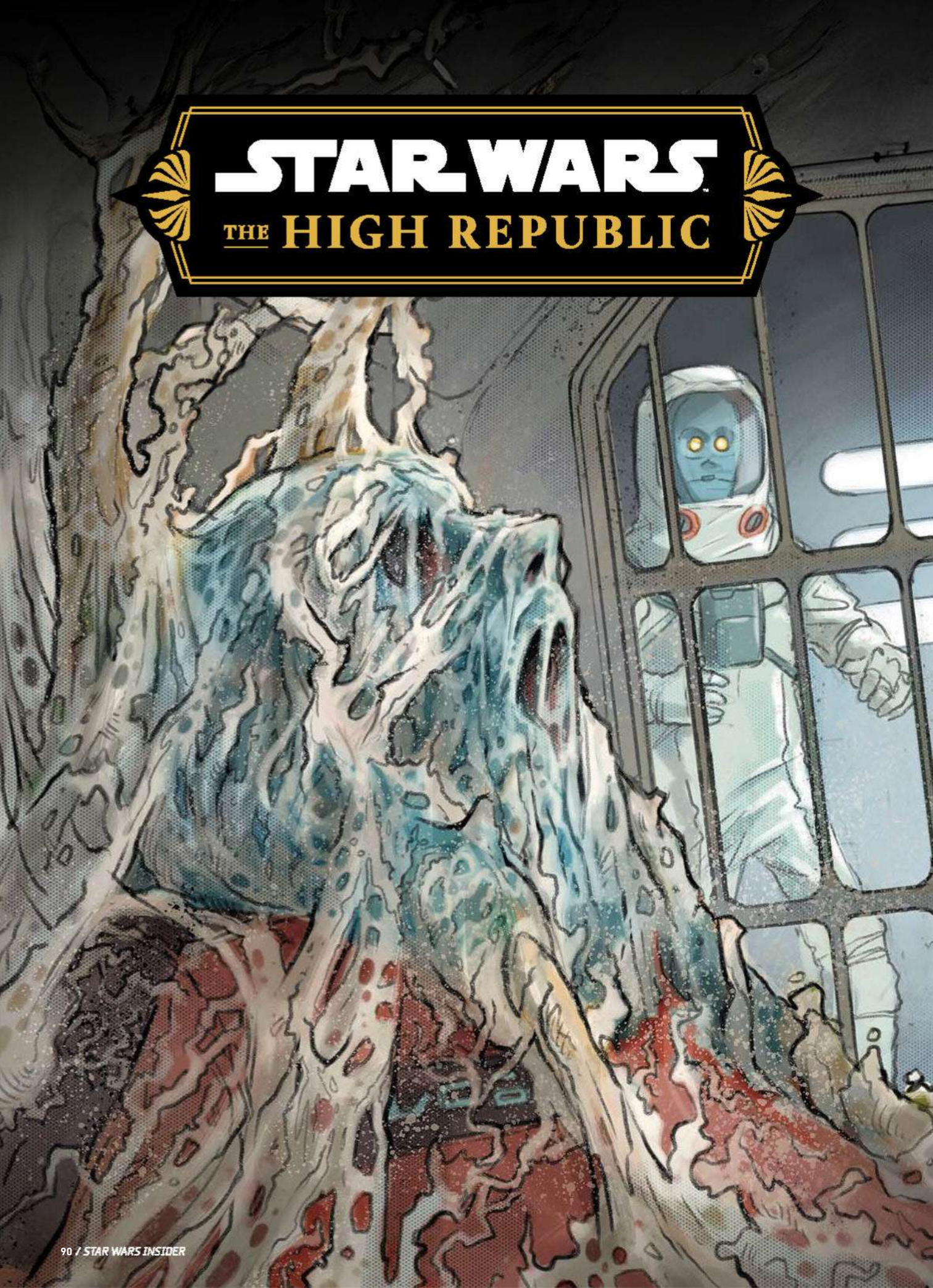
THE MILLENNIUM FALCON: MAKING A MOVIE ICON!
STAR WARS INSIDER
Exclusive Star Wars Fiction!
Mandalorian Mayhem
Insider's Top Ten Battles From The Mandalorian!
ATTACK OF THE CLONES

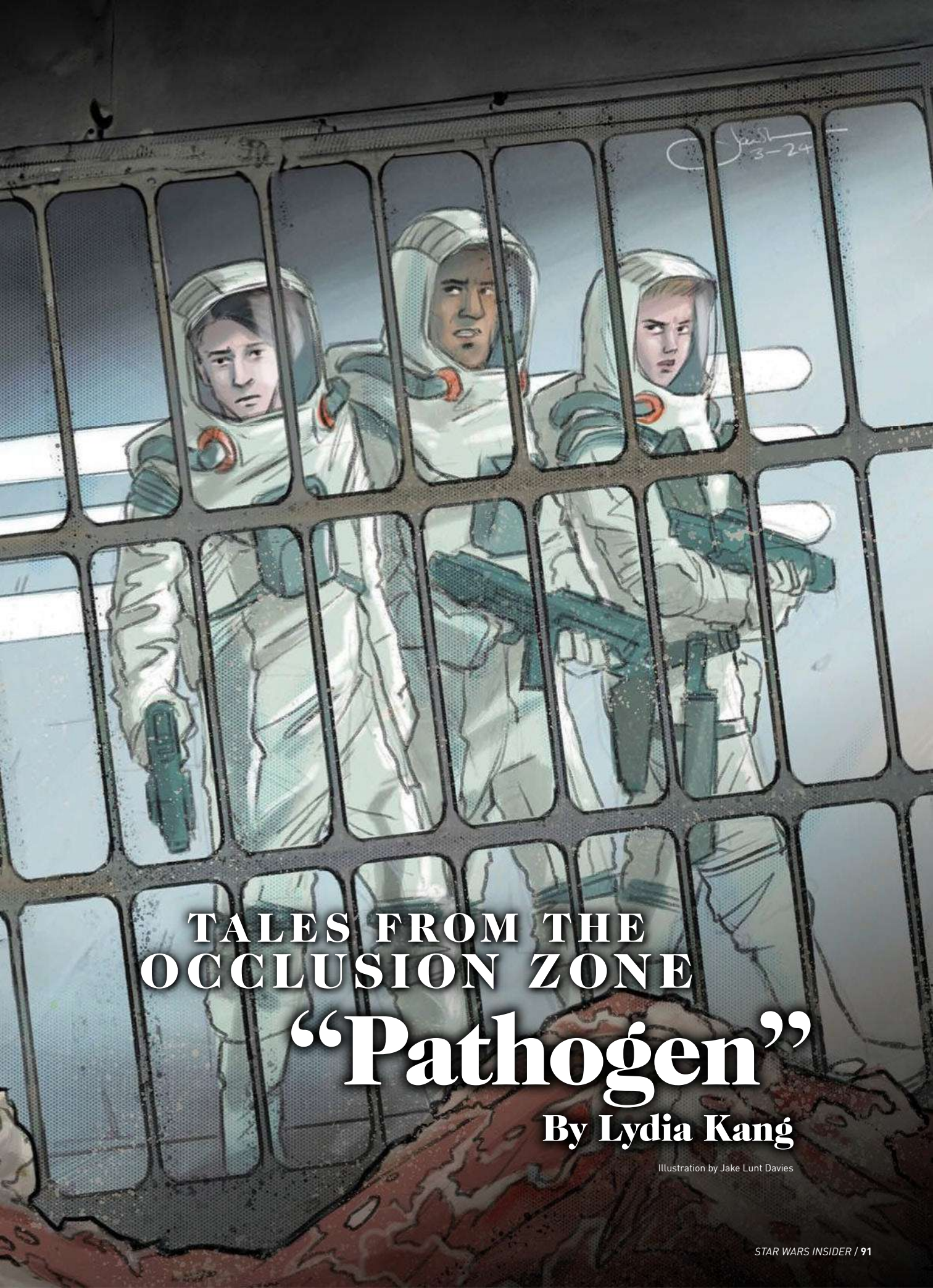
TO TRAIN OR NOT TO TRAIN: BECOMING A JEDI!
STAR WARS INSIDER
Exclusive Star Wars: The High Republic Fiction!
"Hello There"
Decoding Darth Vader
ON SET WITH THE JAWAS!

GALACTIC GALLERY: THE CELEBRATION ART SHOW!
STAR WARS INSIDER
Exclusive The High Republic Fiction!
Making Tracks for Kenobi
TALKING TUSKEN

Complete your collection, buy a gift, pick up a rare cover!

FIND THESE ISSUES AND MANY, MANY MORE AT
TITAN-COMICS.COM/INSIDER


STAR WARS
THE HIGH REPUBLIC

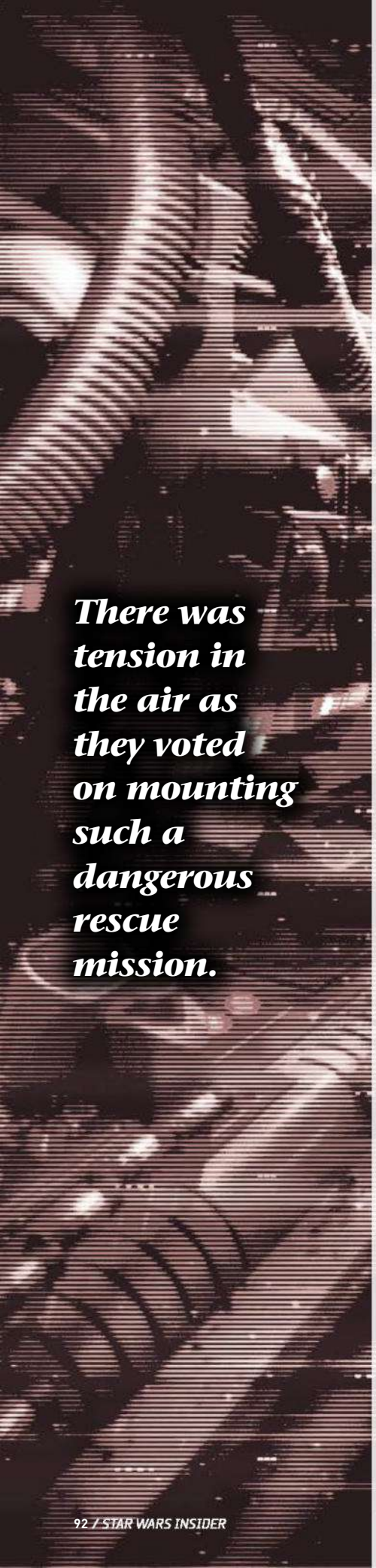


TALES FROM THE OCCLUSION ZONE

"Pathogen"

By Lydia Kang

Illustration by Jake Lunt Davies



There was tension in the air as they voted on mounting such a dangerous rescue mission.

Previously, in a galaxy far, far away….

After rescuing a cell of RDC operatives stranded on an asteroid, the *Aurie* has detected a Nihil prison ship, stricken by a scourge that has decimated its crew. But there is one sole survivor—a prisoner who could unlock the secrets to escaping the Occlusion Zone…

"All in favor for intercepting that ship and saving the prisoner, raise your hand," Joss said, his face grim.

Corporal Elping Tsoo looked at the others uneasily—Visma Tarko, his frosty RDC superior of the past few months; the protocol droid C-06N; and their recent saviors Captains Pikka Adren and Joss Adren. He'd been relieved to meet the couple after spending so long in Visma's cool company as they hid in the wreckage of another Nihil ship, but now there was tension in the air as they voted on mounting such a dangerous rescue mission. Visma and Pikka had already argued over the potential benefits of boarding the ship when Elping had suggested it might have a functional Path drive that would take them out of the O.Z. But the fact was that *something* was taking out the crew and its cargo of prisoners, and they had no idea what that was. The transmission begging for help had mentioned the crew *succumbing* to something. The description had leapt out at Elping, suggesting it was more insidious than an attack. An unknown pathogen perhaps? It was an idea the scientist found unexpectedly exciting.

Pikka raised her hand, and Elping immediately followed suit. To his surprise, Visma raised her hand too. Only Joss did not. The room fell silent.

"Joss?" Pikka said, looking at him quizzically. "Why?"

"I'm sorry, Pikka… I just can't. It's too much of a risk. Who knows what's on that ship. I have a feeling that by the time we get there, that prisoner will be dead. We have a responsibility, beyond just you and me." He gave Pikka a look that Elping didn't understand.

Did he mean me and Visma? Or someone else?

"Well, then we can scavenge the ship, like we did the last one," Pikka suggested. "There will be food, resources…"

"You really want to eat something from a Nihil galley?" Joss interrupted, incredulous.

Visma put her hands on her hips. "If we don't make it to another planet by the end of the month, we are going to starve."

"It doesn't feel right. I don't think it's a good idea."

"*Feel* right? We need to make an objective decision," Pikka told her husband.

"We already did. You were just outvoted, Captain," Visma reminded him. Elping recognized the flick of her hair she made when she'd won an argument. There had been a lot of hair flicking when they were stuck on that asteroid together.

"Whatever is on that ship might kill us," Joss said.

"Or save us," Pikka countered.

The couple stared down each other, their faces drawn with frustration. Just when it seemed he might explode, Joss turned on his heel and left in the direction of the *Aurie*'s cockpit.

"Is he okay?" Elping tentatively asked Pikka.

"Don't worry. I'll deal with Joss. You keep listening to that transmitter. Gather whatever info you can find about that ship," Pikka ordered before turning to Visma. "Prepare for boarding."

Visma crossed her arms once Pikka had departed. "I'm worried this won't go well if they can't agree on anything. It was easier when it was just the two of us," she said.

"You mean when you were the only officer and could boss me around?" Elping raised his eyebrows.

"I did what I did for our survival. There's no room for disagreements in hostile territory."

"I get the feeling they'll sort it

out," Elping said. "They seem like they care about each other. A lot."

"There's no room for that either," Visma said dismissively as she skimmed through the *Aurie*'s inventory of supplies.

Elping's mouth dropped. "You don't really mean that."

"Caring gets in the way. We do what's best for our RDC team. Period. Feeling and fluff make for messy soldiering."

Ah, Elping realized. That would explain why Visma had never asked him a thing about his life in all those months they'd spent together. She didn't care that he'd chosen to leave his ecological work to help the RDC because it was the right thing to do after the fall of Starlight Beacon, abandoning his frail, elderly parents on Coruscant. Or that he absolutely hated it every time he had to pick up a weapon, and how he was sometimes so homesick, the ache seemed like a gaping, burning hole in his chest.

Elping knew he wasn't much of an RDC crewmember—naive and probably a liability. If it hadn't been for his corporal stripes, she probably just saw him as being "in the way."

"You'd better get to work then," he told her, pointing a petulant thumb at his own chest. "This 'mess' has some prep work to do, too."

He ignored the tall Arkanian's sharp glare as he left.

It took as long to prepare for the coming mission as it did to intercept the ship. Joss and Pikka had been locked up in the cockpit the whole time, talking, while Visma had concentrated on how many weapons she could reasonably carry while boarding. As for Elping, he had retreated to one of the spare cabins to plan ahead, happy to be alone. He enjoyed the silence. It helped him think.

He glanced out of the cabin viewport and spotted the prison transport looming nearby. It was a featureless, oblong box of a ship, its hull a mosaic of mismatched metal plates with no viewports save for a cockpit at the front. It clearly wasn't built for speed or maneuverability, but to carry as many prisoners as possible, probably not comfortably. And it appeared to be drifting aimlessly.

He turned back to the Nihil decryptor beside him, teasing the dials in one last search for a communications signal coming from the ship. The original channel had been silent for more than an hour now. Probably not a good sign.

"It's time," Pikka's voice echoed over the comms.

Elping felt the *Aurie* lurch as it locked onto the Nihil vessel. They were ready to board. He glanced about the cabin—a simple room with its lone bed and wash station. It would do. He made some final adjustments on the control panel just outside the door and headed to the supply room.

The four of them gathered at the airlock. Joss looked miserable, Pikka defiant at his side. Visma, grim-faced and tense as a coiled spring, appeared ready for battle, armed with no less than five blasters and a long knife sheathed to her thigh.

C-06N fussed nearby, looking like he'd given himself a polish for the occasion.

"You are all very stressed," the droid advised them. "Objectively, you look terrible."

Joss tilted his head. "Does he need to be here?"

"We'll need Sixen if we meet anyone who doesn't speak Basic," Pikka said. "That is, if anyone is still alive in there."

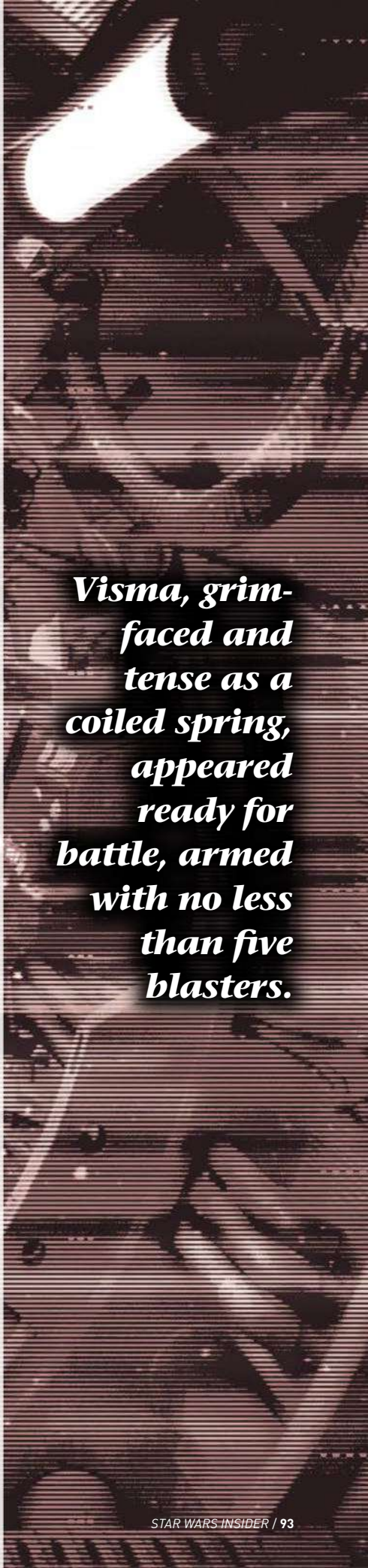
"Oh. That reminds me," said Elping, presenting an armful of white fabric evac suits and respirators to the group. He was already wearing one. "We don't know how hazardous the atmosphere might be."

"This is overkill," Visma said. "The Nihil probably just mutinied and killed each other."

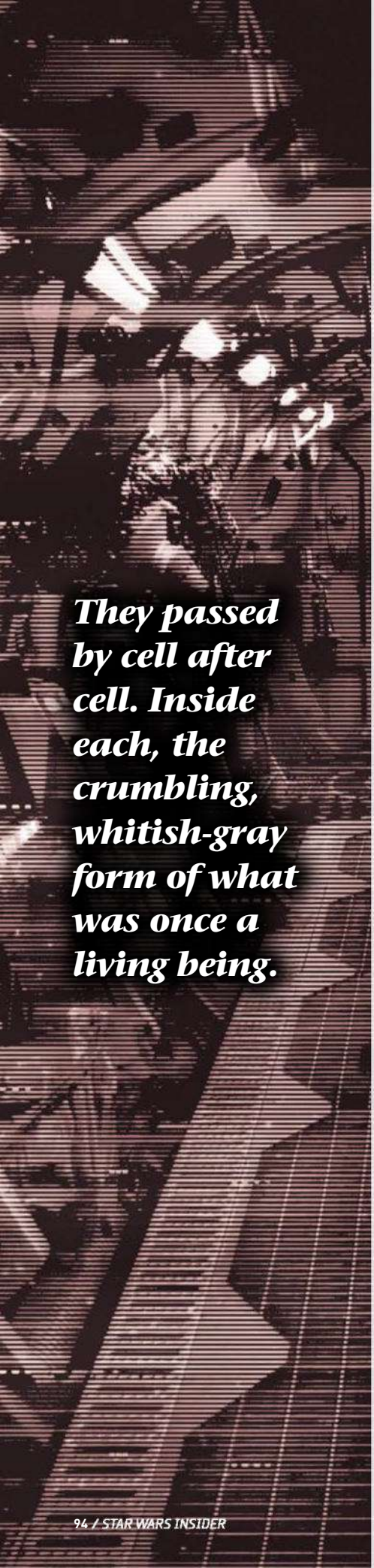
"It doesn't matter," Elping said. "It's basic protocol. You have to put it on."

"Says who, Corporal?" Visma said through clenched teeth.

"Says *me*," Elping replied



Visma, grim-faced and tense as a coiled spring, appeared ready for battle, armed with no less than five blasters.



They passed by cell after cell. Inside each, the crumbling, whitish-gray form of what was once a living being.

pointedly. "I'm the highest-ranking scientific officer on this ship." He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry, Captains. That goes for you too."

Pikka crossed her arms. "Very well. What is the protocol?"

"Protective equipment, including respirators, for all the those who board. I will collect samples, if at all possible, but only if it's safe to do so," Elping said, showing them a medkit hanging from his belt. "I've got a double-layered containment bag with a ventilator for the prisoner, if they made it, in my backpack. I've also outfitted one of the cabins near this loading area as an isolation ward, with negative pressure venting into space." Elping handed a single protective jumpsuit and respirator to Visma, then to C-06N.

"I am a protocol droid! I do not wear garments!" C-06N cried out in dismay when Elping attempted to hand the droid a protective suit.

"Non-organic material might be affected too. Wear it, Sixen," Elping insisted.

"I applaud your authoritarian tone of voice, but I must protest—"

"Wear it, or we'll remove your legs and carry you in a backpack," Elping replied, firmly.

"And on it goes!" the droid said, wrangling the jumpsuit over its silver body, far quicker than Elping ever expected.

With just one set of gear left, Elping turned to Joss and Pikka. "One of you must stay on the ship. Protocol, again. And I would suggest, although it's up to you, that it's Pikka who stays behind, due to…" Elping cleared his throat. "You know."

Pikka gave him a quizzical glance. "How did you know?"

"Know what?" Visma said.

Pikka looked at Visma, and her hand moved protectively to her lower abdomen. "I'm pregnant."

"*In the O.Z.?*" Visma exclaimed. "This zone isn't exactly child friendly!"

"We didn't *exactly* plan to be here," admitted Joss, with a sigh.

"I'm sorry, Captain Adren," Elping said to Pikka. "I was reviewing the medical protocols to prepare for the prisoner, in case they're sick. And your prenatal-screening update was visible when I turned on the monitor. I was going to tell you that you need to turn off the program for privacy's sake, but things got busy."

"If you think I should stay back, I will," Pikka reluctantly agreed.

"It would be the safest decision," Elping nodded. "Your immune system isn't as strong as ours. It's a fact. Someone must stay back, in any case."

"Okay, I said I'll stay" Pikka replied, glancing at Joss, who was clearly relieved. "I'll be ready to detach the *Aurie* as soon as you give the order."

Joss looked at Elping gratefully, then grabbed his gear. "Let's get on with this," he said, suiting up.

The first thing Elping noticed was the absence of sound. He imagined a prison should be filled with noises. Inmates complaining, if they hadn't been subdued into silence. The thump of boots from guards. Doors shutting or closing. Beeps and alarms. But it was quiet as death.

The second thing Elping noticed was the *substance*.

He wasn't sure what else to call it. They entered an airlock, and then a corridor that led to metal ladders going up, left, and walkways with barred prison cells. But the strange substance was everywhere. An off-white, crumbly residue that Elping first saw on the door of one of the cells. Then he saw a body inside it, covered in the stuff. There was a console that was once manned by a guard, now with speckles of the thing all over it. The individual, or what used to be him, lay prone on the floor.

Visma, uncharacteristically, held back and stood behind Elping, as did Joss.

"What is it?" Joss asked.

"I don't know. I've never seen anything like it. It doesn't look quite like a fungus, or an ameboid parasite. Maybe a sprayed weapon of some sort? I just don't know."

Visma was staring at a wire that hung from the ceiling, curving down. The substance was clinging to part of it, like a clump of fluffy sand nearly ready to fall off. She extended a hand,

and Elping immediately shot out an arm, holding her back.

"Don't touch it, Visma. Nobody touch any of it."

His arm continued to hold her back, and she clutched at his wrist. Not in anger, but in fear. How odd, Elping thought. All their months together, Elping and Visma had always kept their distance. No friendly pats on the back, hugs of affection, or angry cuffs. It was unusual for her to show anything aside from steely determination. Whatever this substance was, she couldn't outsmart it. She couldn't tackle it, stun it, kill it. Visma's eyes widened with apprehension. She shrank into a smaller space.

"Stay behind me. Only step where I step," Elping instructed her. Visma gave him a grateful look, and a surprised one. As if she expected him to take this opportunity to get rid of her, or weaken her. Is this what went through her mind, to be on defense all the time? It sounded exhausting. And utterly lonely.

"How silent of you, Lieutenant Tarko!" C-06N said.

"Speaking of silent, shut it, Sixen," Elping said. "The sensor said there was one life-form on this ship. It's on the far side of this hold."

Joss took out his blaster. "Let's go."

They passed by cell after cell. Inside each, the crumbling, whitish-gray form of what was once a living being: a human, a Trandoshan, a Chagrian. All dead. All covered with the thing. Or consumed by it, or transformed into it, it wasn't clear. What worried Elping was that while it appeared to only affect biological organisms, it had spread onto the ship's surfaces too, across the cell walls, the ceiling, and the wiring. Perhaps it was devouring micro bacteria on those surfaces in order to spread?

"I don't like this one bit," C-06N said. "Not one bit."

"I agree with you," Joss murmured.

"Thank the stars we have these respirators on. Watch where you step, too," Elping said.

They made their way around the rectangular scaffolding. Each and every cell contained calcified remains. All dead, their faces and bodies now a dull grayish-white, like volcanic ash or stone.

"The sooner we leave, the better," Joss murmured. He placed his hand against one of the few cell doors that was devoid of the strange substance. It moved. "The cells are open. I wonder if there was a last-ditch effort to let the prisoners free?"

"Doubtful," Visma said. "More likely a glitch that happened when that Nihil guard died."

A strange, wheezing sound emanated from a cell further down the hallway.

"What's that?" Joss asked.

It was followed by a groan. Visma and Joss readied their blasters as the group walked forward. Joss peered inside the cell, his blaster before him.

"We found 'em. The survivor. I don't think we're going to need these," he said, lowering his blaster.

Elping moved forward for a look. Inside the cell was a person, but Elping had difficulty even comprehending what species they were. The body was curled up like an unhatched tadpole. A very dry, desiccated tadpole. The arms and hands were immobile, frozen in place by dried skin that had thickened, peeling in places, almost like an ill-fitting shell. The creature was wheezing, their breath limited by shrunken, hardened skin—as if wearing armor that was far too small for its torso. There was a large, faintly bluish head with bulging, cloudy eyes. They could not see. It looked like the off-white substance had been slowly making its way onto their body, but only affecting the tips of the feet and hands.

Elping cocked his head. He saw barbels hanging off its face. "I think… that might be…a Mon Calamari. A really sick Mon Calamari."

Joss stood by the door, staring. His face behind his respirator slowly changed from confusion to utter shock.

"Captain Adren?" Elping said, thoroughly worried by his reaction.

"Ghal?" Joss whispered, placing his hands on the bars of the cell door. "*Ghal Tarpfen?*"

TO BE CONTINUED

Elping moved forward for a look. Inside the cell was a person, but Elping had difficulty even comprehending what species they were.

NEXT ISSUE: "Tales from the Occlusion Zone" continues, only in ***Star Wars Insider***!

JEDI MASTER'S QUIZ

We're celebrating the 25th anniversary of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* in this issue's quiz. Attune your senses to answer our brain teasers before the Sith beat you to it!

Compiled by Jay Stobie

"ALWAYS TWO, THERE ARE."

Are you the master or an apprentice of *The Phantom Menace* facts?

THE SENATE

1: Who served as the Republic's supreme chancellor when the blockade of Naboo began?

A/ Mon Mothma
B/ Bail Organa
C/ Finis Valorum
D/ Onaconda Farr

2: How did the Trade Federation's delegate respond to Queen Amidala's tale of the invasion?

A/ Claimed she had no proof.
B/ Agreed to her demands.
C/ Blamed it on pirates.
D/ Apolologized for the crime.

3: Who did Senator Palpatine identify as wielding true power over the Senate?

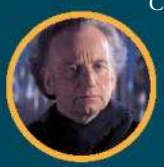
A/ Lawyers
B/ Bureaucrats
C/ Ambassadors
D/ Generals

4: Why was Queen Amidala so frustrated by the Senate's slow pace?

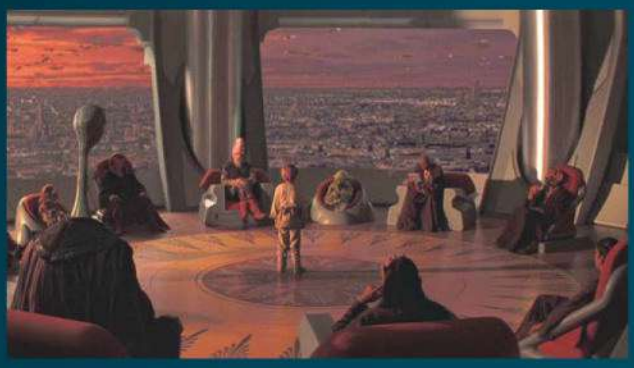
A/ Her bribes hadn't paid off.
B/ Her term was almost up.
C/ Her Jedi protectors abandoned her.
D/ Her people were dying.

5: Through what means did Senator Palpatine suggest deposing the supreme chancellor?

A/ A violent rebellion
B/ A vote of no-confidence
C/ A military uprising
D/ An attempted poisoning



THE JEDI COUNCIL



6: Why were Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi initially dispatched to Naboo?

A/ To negotiate.
B/ To find the Sith.
C/ To fight droids.
D/ To sabotage the blockade.

7: Which member of the Jedi Council belonged to the same species as Yoda?

A/ Yaddle
B/ Eeth Koth
C/ Oppo Rancisis
D/ Adi Gallia

8: Why didn't Ki-Adi-Mundi believe Qui-Gon Jinn's assertion that the Sith had returned?

A/ They were not well trained.
B/ They never existed.
C/ They had been banished.
D/ They were extinct.

9: Which event finally convinced the Council that Darth Maul had been a Sith?

A/ The Trade Federation's defeat
B/ Queen Amidala's celebration
C/ Qui-Gon Jinn's death
D/ Senator Palpatine's election

10: What words did Yoda use to describe the relationship between pairs of Sith?

A/ Parent and child
B/ Master and apprentice
C/ Executive and assistant
D/ Guardian and youngling

THE SEPARATISTS

11: Why did Daultay Dofine want Darth Sidious to agree to end the blockade at Naboo?

A/ To gather reinforcements.
B/ To avoid clashing with the Jedi.
C/ To blockade another system.
D/ To confess to the Senate.

12: What did Darth Sidious command Nute Gunray to do to their Jedi visitors?

A/ Talk to them.
B/ Distract them.
C/ Kill them.
D/ Welcome them.

13: How did Nute Gunray plan on using Queen Amidala to legitimize his occupation of Naboo?

A/ Have her sign a treaty.
B/ Have her exiled.
C/ Have her retire.
D/ Have her executed.

14: What prompted Darth Sidious to assign Darth Maul to help the Trade Federation?

A/ Queen Amidala's escape
B/ A Gungan revolt
C/ Anakin Skywalker's emergence
D/ The arrival of a Republic fleet

15: Despite his capture, Nute Gunray went on to become a member of which faction?

A/ Shadow Collective
B/ Galactic Empire
C/ New Republic
D/ Confederacy of Independent Systems

"THE NEGOTIATIONS WERE SHORT."

Determine who spoke these memorable lines in *The Phantom Menace*:

1. "I CAN ASSURE YOU THEY WILL NEVER GET ME ON ONE OF THOSE DREADFUL STARSHIPS."

2. "I WAS NOT ELECTED TO WATCH MY PEOPLE SUFFER AND DIE WHILE YOU DISCUSS THIS INVASION IN A COMMITTEE."

3. "A COMMUNICATIONS DISRUPTION COULD MEAN ONLY ONE THING. INVASION."

4. "You can't stop the change, any more than you can stop the suns from setting"

5. "WHAT DO YOU THINK, YOU'RE SOME KIND OF JEDI, WAVING YOUR HAND AROUND LIKE THAT?"

"THIS IS SO WIZARD."

Identify the characters from *The Phantom Menace* shown in the images below:

HOW DID YOU DO?

Were you able to restore balance to the Force by answering our questions correctly?

0-9: Try again! Remember, your focus determines your reality.

10-19: You've improved significantly, but there's always a bigger fish.

20-24: Excellent work! You're shown yourself to be mindful of the future.

ANSWERS QUIZ: 1. C, 2. A, 3. B, 4. D, 5. B, 6. A, 7. A, 8. D, 9. C, 10. B, 11. B, 12. C, 13. A, 14. A, 15. D.

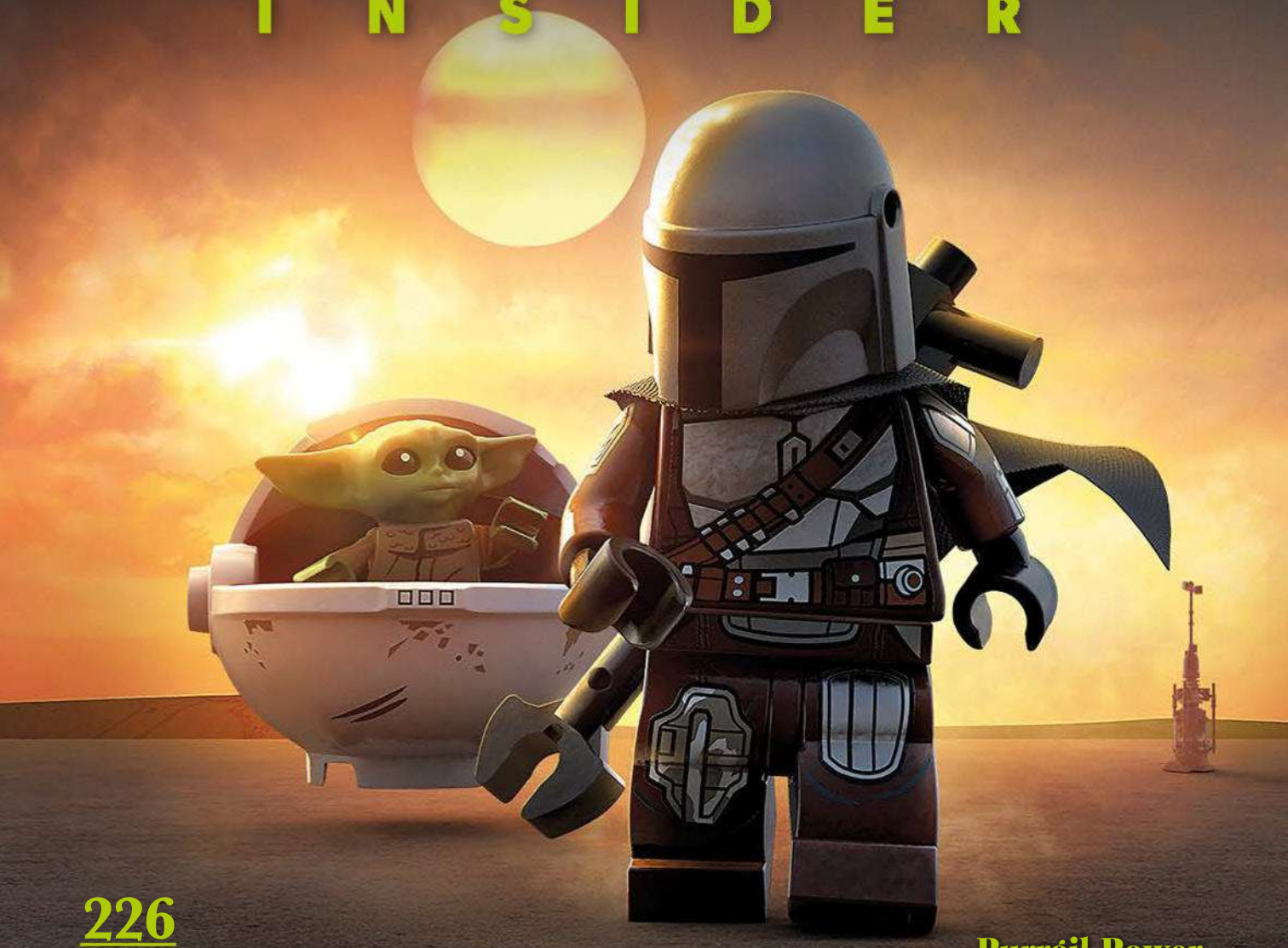
"THE NEGOTIATIONS WERE SHORT" 1. C-3PO, 2. Queen Amidala, 3. Shmi Skywalker, 4. Sio Bibble, 5. Watto.

"THIS IS SO WIZARD" 1. Boss Nass, 2. Sebulba, 3. Captain Panak, 4. Ric Olié, 5. Sabé.

NEXT ISSUE

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE | ISSUE 226

STAR WARS INSIDER



226

LEGO® *Star Wars*

25 years of building a galaxy!

Purrgil Power
Get up to light speed on the hyperspace behemoths

Interviews:
Alexander Freed
Star Wars: Alphabet Squadron author
Amanda Lawrence
The Sequel trilogy's Commander Larma D'Acy

Exclusive Fiction:
The High Republic
All-new Phase III fiction by Lydia Kang

STAR WARS INSIDER TITAN MAGAZINES

Subscribe today at www.titanmagazines.com
U.S. 800 261 6502 | U.K. 01778 392085

Disney · LUCASFILM
© & TM 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd.

COMPLETE YOUR *STAR WARS* COLLECTION!

COMMEMORATIVE MOVIE & TV EDITIONS

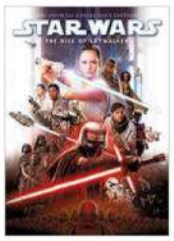
***Star Wars*: *The Clone Wars*: The Official Companion Book**

***Star Wars*: *The Skywalker Saga* The Official Collectors' Edition**

***Star Wars*: *The Mandalorian* The Guide to Season One**

***Star Wars Insider* Presents: *Star Wars: The Mandalorian* Season One: Volume One**

***Star Wars Insider* Presents: *The Mandalorian* Collection**



***Star Wars*: *The Rise of Skywalker* The Official Collector's Edition**

***Star Wars*: *The Last Jedi* The Ultimate Guide**

***Star Wars*: *The Mandalorian* The Guide to Season Two**

***Star Wars Insider* Presents: *Star Wars: The Mandalorian* Season Two: Volume One**

***Star Wars*: *Age Of Resistance* The Official Collector's Edition**

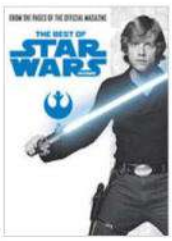
***Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* The Official Celebration Special**

***Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* The 40th Anniversary Special**

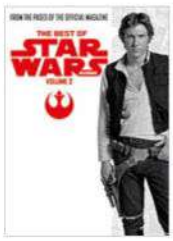
***Star Wars Episode VI: Return of The Jedi* The 40th Anniversary Special**

Star Wars*: *The Book of Boba Fett Collector's Edition

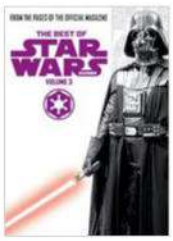
THE BEST OF *STAR WARS INSIDER*



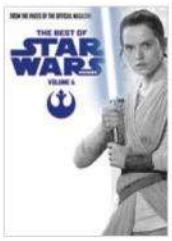
***The Best of Star Wars Insider* Volume One**



***The Best of Star Wars Insider* Volume Two**



***The Best of Star Wars Insider* Volume Three**



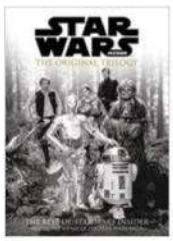
***The Best of Star Wars Insider* Volume Four**

***Star Wars Insider*: The Galaxy's Greatest Heroes**

***Star Wars Insider*: The Galaxy's Greatest Villains**

***Star Wars Insider*: Aliens, Creatures and Droids**

***Star Wars Insider*: Rogues, Scoundrels and Bounty Hunters**

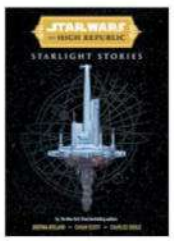


***Star Wars Insider*: The Original Trilogy**

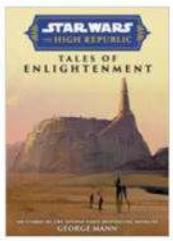
***Star Wars Insider*: Icons of the Galaxy**

***Star Wars Insider*: Fiction Collection Volume One**

***Star Wars Insider*: Fiction Collection Volume Two**



***Star Wars: The High Republic*: Starlight Stories**



***Star Wars: The High Republic*: Tales of Enlightenment**

STAR WARS INSIDER SOUVENIR SPECIALS

***Star Wars Insider*: Special Edition 2022**

***Star Wars Insider*: Special Edition 2021**

***Star Wars Insider*: Special Edition 2020**

***Star Wars Insider*: Special Edition 2019**

***Star Wars Insider*: Special Edition 2018**

***Star Wars Insider*: Special Edition 2017**

***Star Wars Insider*: Special Edition 2016**

AVAILABLE IN ALL GOOD STORES AND ONLINE

TITAN-COMICS.COM

© & TM 2024 Lucasfilm Ltd.

© & ™ Lucasfilm Ltd.